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Adventure

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Let $12.00 to $30.00 a Day

Be Your Goal

Let ELECTRICITY

Be Your Route

LET ME BE YOUR GUIDE

A Big-Pay Job is Waiting for You

ELECTRICITY IS THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Be An "Electrical Expert" You want to get ahead—you want to make more money—big money—Electricity is the field for you! It is the big pay profession of today; **but you must be trained; you must know** Electricity from every angle to hold down a big-pay job—the job that pays.

Earn $12 to $30 a Day

Compare your present salary with these big pay figures. How does your pay envelope "stack up" with that of the trained "Electrical Expert?" Is his pay twice, three or four times as much as you now earn? Don't envy him, don't just wish for pay like his—go after it yourself! You can get it because

I Will Show You How

Yes sir—right in your own home in your spare time I will make you a Certificated "Electrical Expert"—a "Cooke-trained man." As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My system is simple, thorough, complete—no big words, no useless theory, no higher mathematics, just compact common sense written in plain English.

Don't wish any longer, BE a success! I'll show you how!

If you are ready, I am. You don't have to know the first thing about Electricity **right now.** I will train you in a few short months so that you can step right into that big pay business—the job you have always wanted.

"Electrical Experts" are in big demand—more jobs than men to fill them. It doesn't make any difference what you are doing, or what you have been doing, if you want to succeed—if you want big pay—I'll show you how because **I know I can teach you Electricity.** Opportunities in Electricity, great as they are today, are nothing as compared to what they will be tomorrow. Get ready for tomorrow! Get started now! Get in on the ground floor—ahead of the other fellow—jump from a "bossed" into a "bossing" job—jump from $3 to $5 a day to $12 or $30 a day. I know you can succeed once you're a "Cooke-trained man."

I Guarantee Satisfaction There's no chance for failure with me. I train you RIGHT and furthermore I agree, if you're not entirely satisfied, to return every penny you have paid me. No other school will do this for you.

FREE Electrical Outfit To make your success still more certain I give you free a splendid outfit of tools, materials and supplies—you do practical work right from the start and pick up extra money doing spare-time work.

L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer,
Chicago Engineering Works, Dept. 432
2154 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Sir: Send me at once your Big Free Book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert," and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course—all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name...

Address...130

Mail This Coupon Toda

Save $45.50 by Enrollin Nov

If you will send this coupon today, I'll sh h t $45.50. Write today for full particulars—al "How to Become an Electrical Expert." I that big pay job of yours.

L. L. COOKE, CHIEF E

CHICAGO ENGINEERING WOR

INCORPORATED

Dept. 432 2154 Lawrence Avenu

THE "COOKE" TRAINED MAN IS THE "BIG-PAY MAN"

Amazing Low Price

For Brand New Oliver Typewriters

Here is the most wonderful opportunity for buying a typewriter. It saves you from paying the usual price. Never has such a liberal offer been made before by any other typewriter maker. Get the facts. You'll be astonished.

This advertisement brings you an unusual opportunity to own a fine new Oliver, shipped direct from the factory at a remarkably low price—the greatest saving today.

In addition to the rock-bottom price, it is offered to you on easy payments—over a year to pay.

Furthermore, it is sent to you for Five Days' Free Trial, without your paying a single penny in advance.

These are only several of the remarkable details of this great offer. You should mail the coupon at once for complete information. We know you will agree that this is the greatest bargain you've heard of in many a day.

Over 900,000 Olivers Sold

FREE TRIAL

Just think of it—this offer includes a free trial of the famous Oliver No. 9 in your own office or home. We ship it direct from the factory, and you can keep it or return it. We leave the decision to you. If you want to keep it, you can pay on unusually low terms, just like renting. If you want to return it, remember you've not obligated yourself in the slightest.

The Oliver you get on this offer is in every way a $100 machine. It is our latest and finest model, the identical one used by some of the foremost businesses in the country, such as T[illegible]w York Central Lines, Hart, Schaffner & [illegible], U. S. Steel Corporation, N. Y. Edison Company. [illegible]onal Cloak & Suit Company, [illegible] and a host of others.

Regardless [illegible] you cannot buy a finer typewriter, nor one more durable, nor one with so many superiorities. This offer is your greatest opportunity to own the finest typewriter conceivable at the lowest possible price.

Over a Year to Pay

Our plan of payment is as liberal as the price. You get the use of the Oliver and hardly know you're paying for it.

Remember, what we offer is a brand new Oliver, our latest Model No. 9. Do not confuse it with rebuilt, second-hand or used machines. We offer a brand new Oliver for less than the usual price for rebuilt typewriters.

It takes only a minute to clip the coupon and fill it out. Then mail it. Our offer, including beautifully illustrated catalog and a startling expose, entitled "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," will be sent at once by return mail.

Remember, this is the most astounding typewriter offer ever made and you cannot afford to be without the facts. So mail the coupon at once.

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
732 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

SEND NO MONEY JUST THIS COUPON

Mail today and Learn all about this Special Offer

The Oliver Typewriter Company
732 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Please send me without the slightest obligation on my part your special offer, illustrated art catalog and the booklet, "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy."

Name ....

Street ....

City .... State ....

Occupation or Business ....

ADVENTURE
Feb. 28th, 1922

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at [illegible] Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single cop[illegible] [illegible] as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., [illegible] March 3, 1879.

Volume 33
Number 3

A Big Raise in Salary

Is Very Easy to Get, if You Go About It in the Right Way

You have often heard of others who doubled and trebled their salaries in a year's time. You wondered how they did it. Was it a pull? Don't you think it. When a man is hired he gets paid for exactly what he does, there is no sentiment in business. It's preparing for the future and knowing what to do at the right time that doubles and trebles salaries.

Remember When You Were a Kid

and tried to ride a bike for the very first time? You thought that you would never learn and then—all of a sudden you knew how, and said in surprise: "Why it's a cinch if you know how." It's that way with most things, and getting a job with big money is no exception to the rule, if you know how.

We Will Show You How

Without loss to you of a single working hour we can show you a sure way to success and big pay. A large number of men in each of the positions listed are enjoying their salaries because of our help—we want to help you. Make check on the coupon against the job you want and we will help you get it. Write or print your name on the coupon and send it in today.

AMERICAN SCHOOL
Dept. G-2101, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago

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Dept. G-2101, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago

Send me full information on how the **PROMOTION PLAN** will help me win promotion in the job checked.

....Architect
....Building Contractor
....Automobile Engineer
....Automobile Repairman
....Civil Engineer
....Structural Engineer
....Business Manager
....Cert. Public Accountant
....Accountant and Auditor
....Bookkeeper
....Draftsman and Designer
....Electrical Engineer
....Electric Light & Power
....General Education
....Lawyer
....Machine Shop Practice
....Photoplay Writer
....Mechanical Engineer
....Shop Superintendent
....Employment Manager
....Steam Engineer
....Foremanship
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....Surveyor (& Mapping)
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....High School Graduate
....Fire Insurance Expert

Name..

Address..

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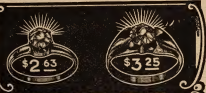

SEND NO MONEY

If You Can Tell it from a GENUINE DIAMOND Send it back

To prove our blue-white MEXICAN DIAMOND cannot be told from a GENUINE DIAMOND and has same DAZZLING RAINBOW FIRE, we will send a selected 1 carat gem in ladies Solitaire Ring, (Cat. price $5.26) for **Half Price to Introduce, $2.63,** or in Gents Heavy Tooth Belcher Ring (Cat. Price $6.50) for **$3.25.** Our finest 12k Gold Filled mountings. GUARANTEED 20 YEARS. SEND NO MONEY. Just mail postcard or this ad. State Size. We will mail at once. When ring arrives deposit $2.63 for Ladies ring or $3.25 for Gents with postman. If not pleased return in 2 days for money back less handling charges. Write for **Free** catalog. **Agents Wanted.**

MEXICAN DIAMOND IMPORTING CO., Dept. A E, Las Cruces, N. Mex.
(Exclusive controllers Mexican Diamonds)

Deafness

Perfect hearing is now being restored in every condition of deafness or defective hearing from causes such as Catarrhal Deafness, Relaxed or Sunken Drums, Thickened Drums, Roaring and Hissing Sounds, Perforated, Wholly or Partially Destroyed Drums, Discharge from Ears, etc.

Wilson Common-Sense Ear Drums

"Little Wireless Phones for the Ears" require no medicine, but effectively replace what is lacking or defective in the natural ear drums. They are simple devices, which the wearer easily fits into the ears where they are invisible. Soft, safe and comfortable.

Write *today* for our 168-page FREE book on DEAFNESS, giving you full particulars and testimonials.

WILSON EAR DRUM CO., Incorporated
313 Inter-Southern Bldg. LOUISVILLE, KY.

WINTER CAP $1.65

Smartest cap you ever saw. Genuine imported all-wool, Scotch Tweed. Beautifully tailored—extra large and full. The kind for which City haberdashers ask $3.00 or more. Extra heavy peak. Just the thing for zero weather yet nothing smarter will be seen on Michigan Boulevard or Fifth Avenue.

Silk-Velvet Lined Ear-lap

Extra long, wide ear-lap, lined with long-nap, heavy, black silk-velvet, resembling seal. Fits tight to head and ears. Keeps out cold. Folds out of sight when not used. Fine for driving.

SEND NO MONEY Just your name, address and head size. Pay postman only $1.65 plus a few pennies postage when delivered. If you don't say it's the most wonderful cap bargain you ever saw, return it and we will refund your money in full. Order one today.

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Big Band Catalog Sent Free

Anything you need for the band—single instrument or complete equipment. Used by Army and Navy. Send for big catalog, liberally illustrated, fully descriptive. Mention what instrument interests you. Free trial. Easy payments. Sold by leading music dealers everywhere.

LYON & HEALY 72-90 Jackson Blvd., Chicago

DO YOU WANT $200 A WEEK?

The Amazing Story of How Carl A. Rowe Jumped from $200 to $1000 a Month

My name is Rowe—Carl Rowe. I live in a small city in New York State.

I am going to tell you an amazing story about myself. It may seem too strange to believe, but you can easily verify everything I have to say.

Two years ago I was a baker. I was struggling along, trying to make the money in my pay-envelope meet the increasing expenses of our family. There was no prospect for the future.

Today, just two years later, I am a successful business man. I have plenty of money for all the things we need and want. Last month I made $876 during my spare time, and was able to put $200 a week in my savings account.

And I'm going to tell you how it happened.

Please remember that two years ago I had no surplus cash. I was in the same fix as nine out of ten other men. Expenses were constantly mounting and my salary, although it had increased, could not keep pace with the cost of living. My wife had to do without things that I knew she ought to have. We wanted an automobile, but we couldn't afford it. We wanted to buy our own home, but couldn't afford that.

It made me desperate to think of what might happen if I became sick or lost my job. I worried about it, and so did my wife. We were living from hand to mouth, and we didn't know what calamity and hardships might be lurking just around the corner.

And yet—today—I own our nine-room house. I have an automobile. I have money for books, the theatre, or any other pleasures that I may want. I have the cash today to educate my son and send him through college.

Here is how it happened. One day in glancing through a magazine I read an advertisement. The advertisement said that any man could make from a hundred to three hundred dollars a month during his spare time.

I didn't believe it. I knew that I worked hard eight hours a day for $50 a week, and I figured that no man could make that much during a couple of hours a day spare time.

But as I read that ad I found that it pointed to men who had made that much and more. In the last paragraph the advertiser offered to send a book without cost. I still doubted. But I thought it was worth a two-cent stamp, so I tore out the coupon and put it in my pocket, and the next day on my way home from work I mailed it.

When I look back to that day and realize how close I came to passing up that ad, it sends cold chills down my spine. If the book had cost me a thousand dollars instead of a two-cent stamp, it would still have been cheap. All that I have today—an automobile, my home, an established business, a contented family—all these are due to the things I learned by reading that little eight-page booklet.

There is no secret to my success. I have succeeded, beyond any dream I may have had three years ago, and I consider myself an average man. I believe that I would be criminally selfish if I did not tell other people how I made my success.

All the work I have done has been pleasant and easy, and withal, amazingly simple. I am the representative in this territory for a raincoat manufacturer. The booklet that I read was one issued by that company. It tells any man or woman just what it told me. It offers to anyone the same opportunity that was offered to me. It will give to anyone the same success that it has brought to me.

The Comer Manufacturing Company are one of the largest manufacturers of high-grade raincoats on the market; but they do not sell through stores. They sell their coats through local representatives. The local representative does not have to buy a stock—he does not have to invest any money. All he does is take orders from Comer customers and he gets his profit the same day the order is taken. Fully half of my customers come to my house to give me their orders.

My business is growing bigger every month. I don't know how great it will grow, but there are very few business men in this city whose net profit is greater than mine, and I can see only unlimited opportunity in the future.

* * *

If you are interested in increasing your income from $100 to $1,000 a month and can devote all your time or only an hour or so a day to this same proposition in your territory, write The Comer Manufacturing Company at Dayton, Ohio. Simply sign the attached coupon and they will send you the eight-page booklet referred to by Mr. Rowe and full details of their remarkable proposition.

------- Cut Out and Mail -------

The Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. C-61, Dayton, Ohio.

Gentlemen: Please send me, without obligation on my part, copy of your booklet and full details of your proposition.

Name ______________________________

Address ____________________________

____

Go to School at Home!

High School Course in Two Years!

You Want to Earn Big Money!

And you will not be satisfied unless you earn steady promotion. But are you prepared for the job ahead of you? Do you measure up to the standard that insures success? For a more responsible position a fairly good education is necessary. To write a sensible business letter, to prepare estimates, to figure cost and to compute interest, you must have a certain amount of preparation. All this you must be able to do before you will earn promotion.

Many business houses hire no men whose general knowledge is not equal to a high school course. Why? Because big business refuses to burden itself with men who are barred from promotion by the lack of elementary education.

Can You Qualify for a Better Position

We have a plan whereby you can. We can give you a complete but simplified high school course in two years, giving you all the essentials that form the foundation of practical business. It will prepare you to hold your own where competition is keen and exacting. Do not doubt your ability, but make up your mind to it and you will soon have the requirements that will bring you success and big money. YOU CAN DO IT.

Let us show you how to get on the road to success. It will not cost you a single working hour. We are so sure of being able to help you that we will cheerfully return to you, at the end of ten lessons, every cent you sent us if you are not absolutely satisfied. What fairer offer can we make you? Write today. It costs you nothing but a stamp.

AMERICAN SCHOOL
Dept. H-2101, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago

AMERICAN SCHOOL

AMERICAN SCHOOL
Dept. H-2101, Drexel Ave. and 58th St., Chicago
Explain how I can qualify for position checked:

...Architect $5,000 to $15,000
...Building Contractor $5,000 to $10,000
...Automobile Engineer $4,000 to $10,000
...Automobile Repairman $2,500 to $4,000
...Civil Engineer $5,000 to $15,000
...Structural Engineer $4,000 to $10,000
...Business Manager $5,000 to $15,000
...Certified Public Accountant $7,000 to $15,000
...Accountant and Auditor $2,500 to $7,000
...Draftsman and Designer $2,500 to $4,000
...Electrical Engineer $4,000 to $10,000
...General Education In one year.
...Lawyer $5,000 to $15,000
...Mechanical Engineer $4,000 to $10,000
...Shop Superintendent $3,000 to $7,000
...Employment Manager $4,000 to $10,000
...Steam Engineer $2,000 to $4,000
...Foreman's Course $2,000 to $4,000
...Sanitary Engineer $2,000 to $5,000
...Telephone Engineer $2,500 to $5,000
...Telegraph Engineer $2,500 to $5,000
...High School Graduate In two years
..Fire Insurance Expert $3,000 to $10,000

Name.................................. Address..............................

An Easy Way to Remove Dandruff

If you want plenty of thick, beautiful, glossy, silky hair, do by all means get rid of dandruff, for it will starve your hair and ruin it if you don't.

The best way to get rid of dandruff is to dissolve it. To do this, just apply a little Liquid Arvon at night before retiring; use enough to moisten the scalp, and rub it in gently with the finger tips.

By morning, most, if not all, of your dandruff will be gone, and three or four more applications should completely remove every sign and trace of it.

You will find, too, that all itching of the scalp will stop, and your hair will look and feel a hundred times better. You can get Liquid Arvon at any drug store. A four-ounce bottle is usually all that is needed.

The R. L. Watkins Co., Cleveland, Ohio

Free Book

Containing complete story of the origin and history of that wonderful instrument—the

SAXOPHONE

Easy to Play Easy to Pay

(4)

This book tells you when to use Saxophone—singly, in quartettes, in sextettes, or in regular band; how to transpose cello parts in orchestra and many other things you would like to know.

You can learn to play the scale in one hour's practice, and soon be playing popular airs. You can double your income, your pleasure, and your popularity. **Easy to pay** by our easy payment plan.

MAKES AN IDEAL PRESENT

Send for free Saxophone book and catalog of everything in True-Tone band and orchestra instruments.

BUESCHER BAND INSTRUMENT CO.
684 Buescher Block, Elkhart, Ind.

Don't Wear a Truss

MR. C. E. BROOKS

Brooks' Appliance, the modern scientific invention, the wonderful new discovery that relieves rupture, will be sent on trial. No obnoxious springs or pads.

Brooks' Rupture Appliance

Has automatic Air Cushions. Binds and draws the broken parts together as you would a broken limb. No salves. No lies. Durable, cheap. Sent on trial to prove it. Protected by U. S. patents. Catalog and measure blanks mailed free. Send name and address today.

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO., 212F State St., Marshall, Mich.

Does The Socket Chafe Your Stump?

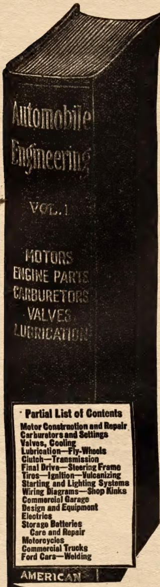
If so, you are NOT wearing

Buchstein's Vulcanized Fiber Limb which is soothing to your stump, cool, neat, light, walls not much thicker than a silver dollar, strong.

Guaranteed 5 Years.

Sold on easy payments to good people. Send for Catalog today.

K. Buchstein Co., 113 6th St., S. Minneapolis, Minn.



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Motor Construction and Repair
Carburetors and Settings
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Lubrication—Fly-Wheels
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Wiring Diagrams—Shop Kinks
Commercial Garage
Design and Equipment
Electrics
Storage Batteries
Care and Repair
Motorcycles
Commercial Trucks
Ford Cars—Welding

NAME	POSITION	SALARY
John	AUTOMOBILE ENGINEER	$125 A WEEK
	REPAIR MAN	$50 A WEEK
	CHAUFFEUR	$40 A WEEK

Put Your Name On this Pay-Roll

Men like you are wanted for big-pay positions in the fascinating field of automobile engineering. We have made it easy for you to fit yourself for one of these positions. You don't have to go to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship. Fifteen automobile engineers and specialists have compiled a spare time reading course that will equip you to be an automobile expert without taking any time from your present work.

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Now ready for you—at a big reduction in price—an up-to-the-minute six-volume library on Automobile Engineering, covering construction, care and repair of pleasure cars, motor trucks, tractors and motorcycles. Brimming over with advanced information on Lighting Systems, Garage Design and Equipment, Welding and other repair methods. Contains everything that a mechanic or an engineer or a motorcyclist or the owner or prospective owner of a motor car ought to know. Written in simple language that anybody can understand. Tastefully bound in flexible covers and gold stamped, 2700 pages and 2400 illustrations, tables and wiring diagrams. A library that cost thousands of dollars to compile but that comes to you free for 7 days' examination.

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Send No Money Now Don't take our word for it. See the books without cost. There is so much profit in this offer for you, that we urge you not to waste a moment in sending for the books. **Put the coupon in the mails today. SEND NO MONEY—only the coupon.**

American Technical Society
Dept. A-102 **Chicago, Illinois**

Mail The Coupon For These Books

American Technical Society, Dept. A-102, Chicago

Please send me a set of Automobile Engineering books in 6 volumes by express collect, for a week's free use. At the end of a week I will either send the books back at your expense or send you $2.80 as first payment and $3.00 each month thereafter until a total of $24.80 is paid. I understand that I will get a membership in your society, including consulting privileges and free employment service if I purchase the books.

Name..

Address..

City..

State..

Reference..

BUY TODAY
10 MONTHS TO PAY

SPECIAL VALUE

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7 Fine Diamonds set in Platinum. Looks like 1½ carat solitaire.

Only $3.80 a month

SPECIAL TERMS—Ten months' credit on any article selected from the SWEET catalogue. **NO MONEY IN ADVANCE.** Shipment made for your examination. First payment to be made only after you have convinced yourself that **SWEET** values cannot be equalled. If not what you wish return at our expense.

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Every transaction CONFIDENTIAL. You don't do justice to yourself and your dollars unless you inspect our unusual values in Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry, Silverware, Leather Goods, etc. Send TODAY for SWEET De Luxe Catalogue. Write NOW. to **Dept. 302-G.**

Capital $1,000,000

"THE HOUSE OF QUALITY"

L·W·SWEET INC.

1650-1660 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

Stop Using a Truss

Reduced Fac-Simile Gold Medal.

Reduced
Fac-Simile

Grand Prix.

STUART'S PLAPAO-PADS are different from the truss, being medicine applicators made **self-adhesive** purposely to hold the distended muscles securely in place. **No straps, buckles or spring attached**—cannot slip, so cannot chafe or press against the pubic bone. Thousands have successfully treated themselves at home without hindrance from work—most obstinate cases conquered.

Soft as velvet—easy to apply—inexpensive. Awarded Gold Medal and Grand Prix. Process of recovery is natural, so afterwards no further use for trusses. We **prove** it by sending Trial of Plapao absolutely **FREE**

Write name on Coupon and send **TODAY**

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Name ....

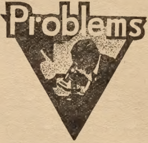
Address...

Return mail will bring Free Trial Plapao.........................

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG

We revise poems, write music and guarantee to secure publication. Submit poems on any subject. BROADWAY STUDIOS, 268 Fitzgerald Building, Broadway at 43d Street, New York.

Are "Hard Times" Bothering You?



Do you find it difficult to make ends meet? Is your problem one of earning more money? Then

Stop Worrying!

Here's a solution to your problem, one that will apply not only in the present emergency, but which assures you of an annual return on your initial investment of time. Become a Butterick subscription representative. The coupon below, mailed promptly, will bring you full particulars and instructions, absolutely without obligation.

No experience is necessary. Spare time is the only requisite. Have you any? If so, we are ready to pay you liberal commissions and a monthly salary. Simply act—*at once!*

- - - - - - **Clip Out—Mail Today** - - - - - -

Manager, Staff Agencies Division
Box 786, Butterick Building, New York

Dear Sir:
Please send me, without obligation, all particulars in connection with your practical, money-making plan.

Name...

Street..

City.................................. *State*..............................

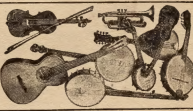
Free to Writers!

The
Wonder Book
for Writers

A WONDERFUL BOOK—read about it! Tells how easily Stories and Plays are conceived, written, perfected, sold. How many who don't DREAM they can write, suddenly find it out. How the Scenario Kings and the Story Queens live and work. How bright men and women, without any special experience, learn to their own amazement that their simplest Ideas may furnish brilliant plots for Plays and Stories. How one's own Imagination may provide an endless gold-mine of Ideas that bring Happy Success and Handsome Cash Royalties. How new writers get their names into print. How to tell if you ARE a writer. How to develop your "story fancy," weave clever word-pictures and unique, thrilling, realistic plots. How your friends may be your worst judges. How to avoid discouragement and the pitfalls of Failure. *How to win!* This surprising book is *absolutely free*. No charge. No obligation. *Your* copy is waiting for you. Write for it *now*. Just address

AUTHORS' PRESS, Dept. 95, AUBURN, NEW YORK

FREE PROFESSIONAL TONE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

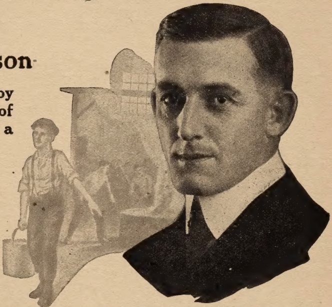


and lessons sent on free trial. Violin, Tenor Banjo, Hawaiian Guitar, Ukulele, Mandolin, Cornet, Banjo Mandolin, Banjo Ukulele, Guitar, Banjo Guitar, or Banjo. Wonderful new copyrighted system of teaching note music by mail. Four lessons will teach you several pieces. Over 100,000 successful players. Do not miss this free trial offer. Write for booklet. No obligations.

SLINGERLAND SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Inc.,
1815 Orchard Street, Dept. 129, Chicago. Illinois

Albright thought beyond his job

By Robert C. Simpson



The true story of the water boy who became Superintendent of the Electrical Department of a $21,000,000 Corporation.

"Boy! Boy!"

Above the din of the great mill came that raucous voice—commandingly, impatiently, almost threateningly.

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Feb. 28th 1922
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Arthur Schwieder

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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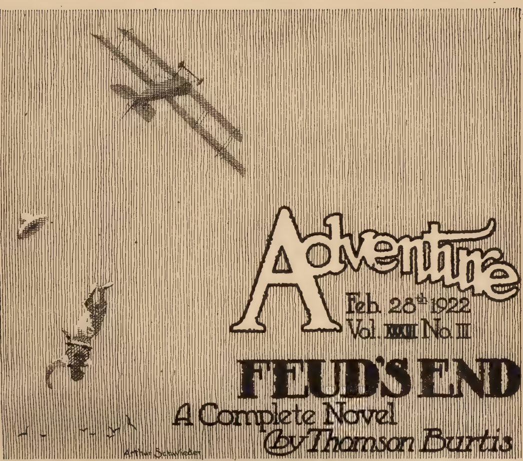
ACROSS the jungle waste of the upper Amazon spreads the infamy of *Caracara-i*, the killer of men and destroyer of homes. Stirred by the tales of his cruelties, two jungle runners and one impetuous Yankee set out alone to hunt the Black Hawk and catch him in his nest. "BLACK HAWK," a complete novelette by Arthur O. Friel in the next issue.

MEN have searched everywhere, at terrible risk, to find the source of Solomon's gold—and failed. But the biggest hunch came to three hard-bitten adventurers who foregathered in a New York hotel, and planned an amazing filibuster into the Sudan—behind the blazing reaches of Sahara and above the dark and dangerous forests of the Niger. "THE LAND OF OPHIR," a three-part story by Charles Beadle, begins in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

**Don't forget the new dates of issue for *Adventure*—
the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



Adventure
Feb. 28th 1922
Vol. XXXII No. III

FEUD'S END

A Complete Novel

by Thomson Burtis

Author of "The Winning Chance," "There and Back," etc.

ALONG the border, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of California, stretches a land which has been the setting for uncounted songs and stories and the scene of numberless life-and-death dramas more romantic, more deadly, more human than words on paper can convey. In the days of the old West the Rio Grande, the Pecos, the Big Bend, the deserts—all were names fraught with meaning, because they brought with them associations of a pioneer country where men of the outdoors fought their way against nature and each other by the rudimentary law of the individual.

Today, in the twentieth century, that same land still stubbornly resists the march of cities and factories and blossoming farms. There are hundreds of miles of mesquite wilderness where a man can wander for days without food or water. The Big Bend, vast and forbidding, still harbors men whom a none too particular country has outlawed. The flaming deserts of the far Southwest are deadly as of yore. And the struggle of the border is going on as it was fifty years ago—not so open a struggle, perhaps, but still raw and elemental.

There are still men along the border who prize their ability to draw and shoot and ride as priceless, because those things mean life to them. The smuggler, the bandit, the gunman, the outlaw—they are still there, and a handful of men who represent the law of a great country fight them, ofttimes hand to hand or gun to gun.

And yet that same land, last outpost of the old pioneer days, is spanned by a thread that represents the peak of civilization's accomplishment. For hundreds of miles there are stretches of desert and wilderness and mountains that are now as they were a hundred years ago, but above them, twice a day from Gulf to Gulf, the airplanes of

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the Army Air Service border patrol keep watchful eyes on the tempestuous land below.

Civilization has sent the fruits of its most recent conquest to span the border, and the Army's youngest branch of the service has sent its best to man them. Whether the airdromes of the patrol lie in the heart of the Big Bend, like Marfa and Sanderson, or whether they be near Douglas or El Paso, the airplanes and the men who fly them have but one duty—to watch unceasingly the seething border country.

The McMullen flight of the patrol counted themselves unusually fortunate. McMullen was a live, progressive town which was proud that the flight was located there, and showed it. And in recent months their pride had been justified to an unusual extent, if notoriety counted for anything. The McMullen flight had become very prominent, largely through the instrumentality of one Lieutenant Lee MacDowell, better known as "Tex," who was a young man possessed of a boundless facility for getting into scrapes that was only exceeded by his ability to get out of them with much credit.

This particular afternoon he was engaged in one of his favorite devices for passing leisure moments pleasurably; namely, arousing the ire of "Pop" Cravath, adjutant of the flight.

Cravath was older than the other officers of the group, by several years, and his years had not taught him to dissemble wrath. At the slightest provocation he would burst forth into a series of crackling remarks and blistering expressions of a distinctly blasphemous trend that caused his comrades to sit back in open-mouthed admiration. Withal he was much the most conscientious and precise member of the group, the C. O. included.

Recently he had taken a notion to learn something about meteorology. McMullen was equipped with instruments and a few trained enlisted men wherewith to gain information in advance about the weather. One of the meteorological section's daily duties was to send up large hot-air balloons, which they studied through a theodolite as they sailed aloft, thereby figuring the direction and velocity of the wind at different altitudes. By this data the flyers were able to know the exact altitude at which the wind would help them most or hinder them least. Cravath had been diligently studying the intricacies of meteorology of late, and today he was going to make the balloon observations himself.

The shack used by the weather experts faced the rear of the recreation building. Tex MacDowell, armed with an ordinary slingshot and some BB shot, watched the door of the shack closely from the recreation hall. The window curtains screened him. A half-dozen airmen were with him, waiting with much anticipation.

Cravath appeared at the door of the shack, tenderly holding a large red balloon, completely inflated. Tex quickly stooped and sighted his slingshot through a convenient knot-hole. Taking careful aim, he let go and a satisfying smack from without was the result.

"—— it!" yelled Cravath, surveying the tattered remains in his hands with much disgust.

He disappeared into the shack once more for another balloon.

He reappeared shortly, his new balloon bobbing about as he held it with meticulous care. Once again Tex fired, and was rewarded with another loud report of bursting rubber and a truly remarkable series of expletives from the adjutant.

The men inside strangled their laughter with their hands until Pop had disappeared once more into the weather sanctum.

"The next time he comes out he's going to have a stroke!" chuckled Binder. "I'll bet he swears for half an hour and never says the same thing twice!"

"Pop sure hasn't learned to guard what his tongue saith," remarked Tex, keeping a wary eye on the door opposite.

Little Pete Miller suddenly exploded without warning into a loud laugh, expelling clouds of cigaret smoke which caused him to cough and laugh at the same time.

"I was just thinking of how Pop bawled out Sergeant Roper the other day when three defective balloons burst in succession," he explained.

Captain Kennard, C. O. of the flight, strolled into the room.

"What's the excitement?" he enquired as he surveyed the group.

"Sh-h-h!" cautioned big George Hickman with uplifted hand.

Cravath was once more emerging into the sunlight, walking as if on eggs and holding the balloon as if it were the most precious of possessions. Tex allowed him to take three or four steps toward the observation tower before he shot once more.

This time the bursting balloon stung Cravath's fingers. His comrades, weak with suppressed mirth, listened delightedly while the fiery adjutant launched into a comprehensive survey of balloons, meteorology and anything or anybody connected with the same. He soared to truly awe-inspiring heights of verbiage.

Captain Kennard finally composed himself sufficiently to ask—

"Who conceived this idea—you, Tex?"

Tex looked down from his six-foot-two into the twinkling eyes of the stocky captain.

"I admit it, with pride," he grinned. "Boy, did you see him hop when the last one hit him?"

"I heard it, anyway," laughed the C. O. "Well, it's time for officers' meeting."

The little company filed out of the room and across into the captain's office. The remainder of the dozen officers who composed the flight were awaiting them there—all except Cravath.

"Go to the meteorological shack and get Lieutenant Cravath," ordered the C. O., and the orderly departed.

While he was gone Tex explained the reason for the mirth of the recent arrivals. Cravath entered in a moment, his face still red with wrath, and seated himself behind his desk.

"Captain," he began unceremoniously, "I want to make a kick about those —— balloons. Three of them——"

He did not get any farther. When the officers recovered and Cravath comprehended what had happened, the dignified adjutant decided to laugh with them. He gazed at Tex, lounging easily against the wall, with twinkling eyes belying his contemptuous expression.

"If you found time hanging heavy on your hands, Tex, you'd play with a rattle!" he observed.

MacDowell was a continual puzzle to Cravath—even Captain Kennard sometimes wondered whether he understood Tex, and the captain knew human nature. The tall young flyer was such a curious combination of boyishness and ability to take care of himself under any circumstances or in any company that he sometimes seemed like two separate individuals in one.

"Well, let's get to business and get this thing over," said the C. O. "Cravath, are there any orders to read?"

The adjutant read a couple of War Department circulars which had been received that day, and then indicated that he was through. The captain settled back in the swivel chair behind his desk and lit a cigaret. His mouth stretched in a broad grin that made the big scar on his cheek wrinkle deeply as he surveyed his staff of flyers and observers. He ran his hand through the short, bristly pompadour that stuck up on his head and then shook his head sadly.

"I've got bad news for you," he began. "Not so bad for you, maybe, as for the boys at Donovan Field. It's about booze."

He quickly shuffled through the papers on his desk, finally drawing out a letter which he glanced over as if to refresh his memory.

"It seems that a few days ago a representative of the law in San Antonio, acting presumably at the instigation of some San Antonio reformers, came out to Donovan Field and raised —— with Colonel Mills about the liquor being carried from the border to Donovan Field. The last dance they had was pretty well oiled with *taquila*, *aguadiente* and whisky, I guess. This minion of the State likewise made some cracks about there being some suspicion that maybe some of the boys were carrying opium up to make a little kale.

"Of course that's ridiculous. Perhaps a border flyer, now and then, packs a bottle in his suitcase, and offers a drink to some of his friends who are parching up at Donovan Field, but that's all."

A chuckle ran around the circle of flyers.

"Well, anyhow," the captain resumed, cocking a contemplative eye at the last smoke-ring, "they're squawking about it up around effete San Antonio, and orders from headquarters are that every ship coming in from—or back to Donovan Field from—the border, will be thoroughly searched and severe disciplinary action taken on the pilot of any ship carrying any of the demon rum. I imagine the civilian authorities may swoop down at any moment, likewise, for a little private search."

He grinned as a thought struck him.

"The boys at Donovan are out of luck," he remarked.

"And we're not going to be near as popular as we were," drawled Tex. "The last time I landed at Donovan it looked as if they were having an officers' review in my honor."

"Well, when you and George fly up there tomorrow you'll have a chance to see it at first hand," replied the C. O.

His face became serious again.

"All kidding aside, fellows, orders are orders and we'll live up to them. The rest of the border had better do it too, because it's a —— cinch that —— is going to pop when they catch somebody, especially if any civilian official pokes his nose in. Don't any of you get mixed up. That's all."

II

NEXT morning the sun rose in a cloudless sky, giving promise of a terriffically hot day, so Tex and George Hickman, his observer, decided to get an early start for Donovan Field before the mounting sun made the flying bumpy. Consequently it was only seven-thirty when Sergeant Cary, chief mechanic of the flight, started to warm up the big four hundred and fifty horsepower Liberty motor in MacDowell's DeHaviland plane.

Tex, who was engineer officer and test pilot of the flight, was to test a new DeHaviland at Donovan Field and fly it back to McMullen, leaving the old ship there for overhaul and repair, it having had its allotted number of hours in the air. Big, blondely handsome Hickman was going along just to take a look at San Antonio and see a show. Early as it was, Pete Mills and Wallace had started on the eastern morning patrol, and Binder and Cravath were fifty miles on their way westward along the Rio Grande.

MacDowell and Hickman, swinging their helmets and goggles in their hands, strolled from the mess-hall toward the ship, which had been started and was idling gently. The air was quiet, for it was too early for the Gulf breeze to be stirring. The airdrome, four hundred yards square, was bounded on three sides by hangars, frame barracks, mess-halls and storehouses. Their ship was on the line in front of the hangars.

The roar of the motor increased as Cary slid the throttle forward a trifle. The wheels began to press against the blocks that held them, and the two mechanics who were holding each wing set themselves to hold the ship. Little by little the throttle crept forward under the sergeant's careful hand, until the man sitting on the tail to keep the ship from nosing up was compelled to turn his back and lean against the propellor blast. For a few seconds the noise of twelve mighty cylinders firing in rotation was almost deafening, and then as slowly as the motor had been turned on it was cut down to idling.

Tex and Hickman fastened their helmet straps and adjusted their goggles as Cary climbed out of the cockpit. The pilot adjusted his belt, tried both switches, and studied air, oil, and temperature gages briefly. He turned around and Hickman nodded that he was ready. Tex signalled the mechanics, who pulled the wheel blocks. There being no wind, he slowly pushed the throttle and spark ahead until both were wide open. A little pressure on the stick and the tail came up. For a hundred yards they roared across the ground, and then the hard-packed sand dropped away beneath them.

Tex hunched down further behind the windshield, as they circled the field, to escape the terrific pressure of air which was the result of their whirring propeller and a hundred miles an hour of airspeed. Two circles of the field brought them up to two thousand feet and assured him that the motor was running well. He banked around and headed north for the two hundred and fifty mile grind to Donovan Field.

There being no particular hurry, he followed the railroad. It was thirty miles shorter to fly an airline straight across the mesquite, but along the railroad there were a few fields which might be possible landing places if the motor cut out. To the border patrol flyer, accustomed to gamble his life against his motor as he flew for hours over trackless mesquite, it seemed very comfortable to have any cleared places at all below him.

It was thoroughly characteristic of Tex to take the railroad course instead of the airline, although the average person who knew him would expect him to take a chance on the shorter but more dangerous route. He had won his reputation as the premier pilot of the border by a succession of brilliant, often reckless, flying achievements. A dozen times his fellow pilots had watched him stall down in a DeHaviland, than which there is no more ticklish or expert bit of flying, and gasped at the chance he was taking. But in doing that he was depending on his ability to handle the ship.

Should he take the airline to San Antonio, no skill of his could save a crackup, perhaps death to both passengers, in the event of a forced landing in the thick mesquite. Consequently, inasmuch as there was no need for haste, he did the safest thing.

Tex possessed, unconsciously perhaps, a great confidence in himself that was the result of experience and self-knowledge, minus conceit. Nine out of ten people who knew him only by reputation would have rubbed their eyes with wonder that he should take the safest course. When Tex became reckless, it was a calculating recklessness that depended little on the infallibility of an airplane motor and much on the flying ability of Tex MacDowell.

A half-hour, and the ship had climbed gradually to five thousand feet. The edge of the mesquite wilderness, a hundred and fifty miles long, slipped behind them. To the left, as far as the eye could see, the scrubby forest of grayish-green billowed away to the skyline. The ship was slightly right-wing heavy, but nevertheless the sturdy motor drew it through the air at a hundred miles an hour, even though it was throttled down to fifteen hundred revolutions a minute. Once in a while Tex was compelled to pump the air, which failed to hold up to three pounds, but otherwise the old ship seemed to have escaped the effects of age.

The last fifty miles of the trip, which were over more open country, were rather bumpy, as the rapidly heating atmosphere started currents of warm and cold air that reached even to five thousand feet. Both airmen were glad to see the level expanse of Donovan Field come into view, the mile-long rows of hangars, barracks and machine shops standing out vividly white against the green. Tex started to dive when he was still ten miles from the field, throttling his motor to twelve hundred. By taking a long, gradual dive with motor partly on, overfast cooling was prevented, and the spark plugs would not foul. Right to the last the great Liberty did its duty—every gage read correctly as the big ship shot over the southern edge of Donovan Field and the motor went full on again.

Tex circled the field at five hundred feet to look at the landing T. It was pointing southeast. He sideslipped over the hangars and with instinctive judgment leveled out less than two feet above the ground. The speed dropped to seventy five, then to seventy miles an hour. For just an instant the ship seemed to hover and the pilot jerked back on the stick. The tail came down and they landed smoothly.

AS THEY taxied to the line opposite hangar 11, where visiting ships were always taken care of, the two border pilots looked around them appreciatively. After the small, difficult airdrome at McMullen it was almost imposing even to them to watch a dozen ships at a time landing and taking off all around the mile-square field about them.

They found a niche on the line between a little S. E. 5 and a low-hung, wicked looking Le Pére. As they climbed out Lieutenant Harrow, one of the assistant adjutants, and two civilians approached quickly. They were standing beside the border ship before mechanics had a chance to get blocks under the wheels. Tex nodded to Harrow, and then shut off his gas flow. After a half-minute the motor gurgled and spit, and then the propeller gradually stopped. He snapped off the switches—he had run the gas out to prevent back-firing—and crawled out.

"Hello, Harrow," he greeted the Donovan Field man, who had already shaken hands with Hickman.

" 'Lo, Tex. Just got Captain Kennard's wire that you were on the way a few minutes ago. Good trip?"

"Came by the railroad—2:45," returned Tex, expertly rolling a cigaret with one hand while he replaced the makings in his pocket with the other.

"Meet Mr. Snow and Mr. Crillon—Lieutenant MacDowell and Lieutenant Hickman."

Both the civilians, who were middle-aged men of commonplace appearance, looked at the airmen with considerable interest.

"Heard a lot about you two—in fact I saw you in the movies," stated the stouter of the two, who had a red face and a jovial smile.

"Yes, when George hung out on the wing so we could land without a wheel he sure made us matinee idols," grinned Tex, referring to an incident that had been caught by the camera man of a news-weekly.

"Well, did you bring in any booze, Tex?" inquired Harrow, his blue eyes twinkling.

"I hope you didn't, because these two chaps are from the Department of Justice in San Antonio."

"What? Liquor?" asked Tex in horrified tones.

The stout man—Crillon—looked up at the broad-shouldered, tanned pilot apologetically. MacDowell's mouth, which ordinarily had a whimsically humorous quirk at the corners, stretched into a grin and the crinkles around the keen gray eyes deepened.

"George, are you a bootlegger?" he asked.

Hickman shook his head.

"Not enough money in it," he replied confidentially.

"I don't know what got the chief started, but 'orders is orders' and we'll have to pry around a little, lieutenant," said Crillon.

"Help yourself," replied Tex, with a wave at the ship.

Their suitcases were wired on the wings, one on each side of the fuselage.

Snow, who had a pair of cold blue eyes and a cigar clamped in his mouth, immediately climbed up on the wing for a look at the cockpits. He had not said a word thus far except to acknowledge the introductions.

"What are you, an Army sleuth now?" Hickman asked Harrow.

"Representing headquarters," returned Harrow genially. "Get those suitcases unwired, will you, sergeant?"

Two of the mechanics, at a word from the sergeant in charge of the hangar, unwired the bags. Tex and Hickman smoked contentedly, watching the busy field idly. Scouts, bombers and training-planes were all discernible landing and taking off, and down the line the noise of many motors warming up filled the air with a low drone.

The two operatives, with Harrow watching them, took a brief look at the suitcases and then closed them.

"Guess you get a clean bill of health, lieutenant," said Crillon.

"Why the sudden access of virtue around these parts?" asked Tex.

Harrow shrugged his shoulders.

"Search me."

"And me," added Crillon. "This is my first shot at it, and the chief told me nothing."

"We might take this off," said Snow suddenly, his hands on the turtleback which forms the top of the fuselage.

"All right," replied Harrow.

At a word from him the mechanics started knocking out the pins that held the turtleback to the fuselage itself. In a moment, with Hickman helping them, they lifted the wood-and-linen cover off.

"Well, for the love of Mike!" said Hickman in surprized tones. "What's this bag doing here?"

Crillon and Harrow, suddenly serious, untied a small canvas bag that was hung from one of the top cross-braces of the fuselage. Tex, as surprized as his observer, watched Snow untie the string around the mouth of the bag and hold it upside down. A dozen tins rolled out on the ground.

"Opium!"

It was a chorus—almost ludicrous in the different gradations of surprize and, in the cases of Harrow and Hickman, horror. A curious swarm of mechanics encircled the group and a few passing officers stopped to find out what was the matter.

Snow and Crillon quickly weighted the cans. They were all heavy. The top was pried off one, and the dark, sticky substance inside told its own story. With one accord every one looked at the two men from McMullen. Tex and George glanced at each other quickly. In the eyes of each was an unspoken question—and the swiftly flashed answer was satisfactory.

"Well, I'll be ——!"

MacDowell's words were slow, almost gentle, but there was a curious change in his appearance. He lounged against the fuselage as easily as ever, cigaret in hand. The half-mocking twist at the corners of his mouth was still there, but the wideset gray eyes, slightly narrowed, were blazing with what seemed like the reflection of some inner fire. There was a lot of recklessness—a kind of fierce joy of battle there. Hickman's face was merely a still-life illustration of horrified surprize.

Harrow touched the two flyers lightly on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry, but you will consider yourselves under arrest," he said, his lined face very serious.

Tex grinned, although his eyes were still shining with that savage delight in pitting himself against he knew not what.

"Don't cry about it, pardner," he said slowly. "Of course those —— cans are news to us as well as to you, but you can't do anything else. Where do we go from here?"

"To the old man, I guess," replied Harrow. "Do you gentlemen wish to accompany us?"

Crillon and Snow shook their heads.

"We've got no jurisdiction here. We're just nosing around to help out. Of course you understand that a full report will be made, and that if the civilian authorities wish to press the matter, providing they are not satisfied with the action taken by the military, it will be taken up later," replied Crillon.

The curious crowd of officers and men watched Harrow and the two border men start for the C. O.'s office. Harrow carried the opium, repacked in the bag. In some way the news had spread ahead of them, and as they traversed the wide concrete highway which ran between the row of hangars and the barracks and officers' quarters excited knots of officers and men met them every few yards.

"Good ——, Tex, I'm afraid you boys are in a mess," Harrow told them as they approached headquarters.

"Looks that way," replied George moodily. "Of course there is only one explanation, Tex."

Tex nodded. Harrow looked at them questioningly.

"You mean?"

"Fitzpatrick. It would have been easy for one of his men to get in the hangar last night and plant the stuff."

Harrow nodded.

"I thought as much. Of course we don't know much about what is happening down there, but a few seepings of gossip about the little tiffs you've been having with that old —— have filtered up this way. I hope you can convince the old man, Tex."

"I'm trying," Tex returned gently. "George, we sure are the prominent boys around Donovan. Look at that reception committee!"

Twenty-five or thirty officers were grouped around headquarters building. That Tex MacDowell, who in a few months had become the most talked-of pilot in the South, should be caught smuggling opium was an event not lightly to be overlooked. Hickman, the Texan's chief aid in his most widely known flying achievement, was likewise a famous character around Donovan, although few of the Donovan airmen except the older group knew either one of the border men.

Major Schaffer, operations officer of the field, hurried down the walk to meet Harrow and his charges.

"For the love of Heaven, Tex, what the —— have you been doing?"

"Carrying opium, they tell me, but I'll be —— if they didn't have to tell me before I knew it," grinned Tex.

"Going in to the colonel?"

"Yes, sir," replied Harrow.

The tall, lanky young major, who had a distinguished overseas record, put his mouth close to MacDowell's ears.

"Tex, tell me straight, as man to man. Do you know anything about this?"

Tex, his blazing gray eyes belying the easy carelessness of his manner, met the major's eyes squarely.

"Not a —— thing, major."

"Then you think that Dave Fitzpatrick is behind it?"

"I know it!" interjected Hickman as they mounted the steps.

The group of officers parted silently. A few who knew the two flyers spoke to them in half-embarrassed tones. All of them saluted the major.

"Harrow, when you see the old man tell him that I would like to see him on this matter—that I have something of importance to say concerning it," said the major in suddenly crisp phrases.

"Yes, sir."

Harrow disappeared into the adjutant's office, and in a few seconds came to the door of his own office, where he had left the three.

"The colonel wants to see you right away," he said. "Major Schaffer, he wishes you to come in at the same time."

The four officers, Major Schaffer in the lead, filed silently into the office of Colonel Mills. He was sitting at his desk, signing papers. He was a stocky, gray headed man with a strong, square-jawed countenance and keen blue eyes that years in the Philippines and the Southwest had surrounded with a multitude of wrinkles.

The four came to salute, which the colonel returned negligently.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he said, and went on signing papers.

He stole frequent glimpses at MacDowell from under lowered lids as he automatically spread his signature on document after document. For months gossip from the border had indirectly reached his ears about the man who was now lounging easily before him, shirt open around the tanned throat and thick brown hair tousled from the wind. Both Tex and Hickman were oil-grimed and dirty, just as they had climbed out of their ship. They carried helmets and goggles in their hands.

Finally the colonel finished and leaned back in his chair, his eyes meeting MacDowell's squarely for the first time. The C. O. lit a cigaret, the while he appraised the Texan with puckered eyes.

"All right, Harrow," he said at length, his eyes shifting to the assistant adjutant's face.

Harrow told the story briefly and presented the bag of opium cans as evidence. A hum of conversation from the veranda of the small building reached the ears of the men in the colonel's office, and two or three times the C. O. glanced up irritably. As soon as Harrow had finished he rung a bell, and Captain Peele, his adjutant, entered.

"Tell that bunch of —— gossips on the porch to get to —— away from here," he ordered. "Headquarters is no officers' club on this field!"

The captain departed, and the colonel looked speculatively at Tex and Hickman.

"You flew with the English during the war, didn't you?" he inquired suddenly.

"From 1914 on, sir," replied the flyer.

"Got three boche, somebody told me. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hum. Well, what have you and your movie partner got to say about this opium deal? It would have been bad enough if it had been only whisky. Did you people at McMullen get the orders from Colonel Feldmore about carrying liquor?"

"Yes, sir," stated Hickman. "And neither MacDowell or I know any more about how that opium got in our ship than you do!"

There was no mistaking the sincerity of the big observer's vigorous statement. Major Schaffer got the colonel's eye.

"Will the colonel give me permission to say a word?" he asked.

"Go ahead. I was wondering what in —— you were horning in on this deal for, anyway," commented the colonel dryly.

The major smiled.

"Here is what I wanted to say, sir, in a nutshell. You may or may not know that Lieutenant MacDowell here has twice come up against Dave Fitzpatrick. Anyhow, you know Fitzpatrick for the most powerful, unscrupulous man in the Southwest. Am I right?"

The colonel nodded.

"Well, for reasons dating from years back, this uncrowned king of the border is out to get MacDowell. Captain Kennard, a very close friend of mine, has told me the whole story. What I was going to suggest, sir, was that Captain Kennard be brought to Donovan Field to present the case—I am sure it would carry more weight than if Tex—I should say Lieutenant MacDowell—told it himself. Personally, I have known these men some time, and through their C. O. I know them very well. I believe they are innocent. With Captain Kennard to give all the dope about how Fitzpatrick has tried to frame MacDowell before, I believe that we can convince you or a court martial of their innocence."

The colonel smoked contemplatively for a moment and then made his decision.

"This case is open and shut. If for no other reason than the complaints which have come to us from San Antonio—rather mysterious the way they suddenly started, too—we must take every step to apprehend and severely punish any lawbreaker in the service. Nevertheless, I know Fitzpatrick, and I know good men——"

He broke off for a moment, his thoughts evidently far away. He threw away his cigaret impatiently.

"My mind is open on the subject. I'll have Captain Kennard wired to fly up here this afternoon. Unless the matter is satisfactorily cleared up, of course a general court martial is inevitable. As matters stand now, you must be tried. You men will consider yourselves under arrest. You will report to me at ten o'clock tomorrow morning in this office. Harrow, fix up quarters for them and notify the provost marshal. That's all."

III

THAT evening, obeying an order from Colonel Mills through one of his orderlies, Tex and Hickman reported to headquarters. They found there the colonel himself and Captain Kennard, who had flown in from McMullen during the afternoon. With them was Colonel Feldmore, Department Air Service

Officer. He was a tall, spare man of middle age with a rough-hewn face and a wide reputation throughout the army. He was known as one of the fairest men in the Army—but a bad *hombre* if somebody ran foul of him. And he never set out to accomplish the complete and lasting subjugation of a man unless he had good reason for so doing. He knew his own mind, and changed it for neither man nor devil.

The two flyers saluted their three superiors, and waited silently. Both were now in full uniform, from stock to boots. Underlining the double-wing on MacDowell's blouse was a row of ribbons—the Croix de Guerre with three palms, the ribbon with a rosette representing the Legion of Honor, and the British D. S. O.

"Sit down, gentlemen. We have called you here for a complete discussion of the incident of this morning."

Colonel Mills stopped a moment as the noise of an automobile motor stopping in front of headquarters reached his ears.

"It is rapidly growing in importance. The newspapers tonight are full of it. It is something which for the good of the service —and I hope for your own good as well— must be plumbed to the bottom quickly. You realize, of course, what a blot on the service it has become already."

Heavy steps sounded in the hall.

"No, never mind, son. I'll just mosey right in," somebody said to the orderly outside, and then the door was thrown open unceremoniously.

Tex leaped to his feet as if he had been shot.

"Dad! How in the world——"

The gray-bearded giant in the doorway grasped his son's hand and pumped it enthusiastically.

"Just dropped in for a social call," he replied with a rumbling laugh.

His twinkling blue eyes, set in a face the color of mahogany, looked the flyer up and down affectionately. The other four men were on their feet. For some reason none of them, except Hickman, appeared greatly surprized.

"Now, what in —— have you been up to, you limb of the devil?" asked Mr. MacDowell, still holding his stalwart son's hand.

Tex was big, but his father dwarfed him. He was six feet four as he stood, and must have weighed two hundred and fifty pounds without being fat. His huge black sombrero was pushed back on his head. His gray suit, soft white shirt and black tie were all of conventional cut, although a discerning eye might have noted that the shirt was silk and that the suit could not have been purchased for a cent less than a hundred dollars.

"Limb of the devil?" inquired Tex with a grin. "I've heard other people call you——"

"Don't get disrespectful," warned the old ranchman with his rumbling laugh. "What these here generals could do to you wouldn't be a patch on what your old daddy would accomplish when he got started."

"Excuse me. Colonel Feldmore, Colonel Mills, Captain Kennard, and George Hickman—my father."

Mr. MacDowell shook hands with them all. When he got to Hickman he stopped for a moment, twisting his plentiful gray mustache while he took a good look at the observer.

"Boy, I'll swear I get weak-like every time I remember seein' those movies o' you climbing around one of these —— airplanes. I don't know what this mess o' Lee's is that the captain wired about, but are you in it?

George grinned.

"Up to the neck, sir," he admitted ruefully.

Tex glanced at the captain quickly. So *he* had got in touch with MacDowell, senior, had he?

"Well, let's hear the lay," demanded the old man finally, easing himself into the biggest chair in the office.

In concise sentences Colonel Mills told of what happened that morning. While he was speaking MacDowell senior drew a package of brown cigaret papers from a capacious pocket, filled one of them with tobacco, and rolled it in the twinkle of an eye. He lit it deliberately. It was almost ludicrous to see so huge a man with so diminutive a smoke tucked underneath the flowing gray mustache.

"I sent for you for a reason that I will explain in a moment," said Captain Kennard when the colonel had finished. "I didn't tell Tex because I was afraid he'd object. I did it on my own responsibility, because I've heard a lot about 'Roaring Bill' MacDowell and I knew you could help us clear your son."

Mr. MacDowell removed the sombrero

thoughtfully and placed it on the floor. His thick, iron gray hair stood up in terrifying disorder after he had run his fingers through it a few times. Holding the stub of his cigaret between his fingers, he turned and looked at Tex, who was sitting beside him.

"How about it, son?" he asked quietly.

Tex, his expression thoroughly serious for once, met his father's eyes squarely.

"I saw that stuff for the first time out here on the field, dad," he replied.

"Of course. Just asked you to have it on record."

He lifted himself to his feet, the other men watching him closely.

"Gentlemen, the idea of Lee's doing that is ridiculous on the face of it. I am not in the habit o' bragging about how much I'm worth, but I rise to remark that I can sign a check for a lot of money, and every nickel of it is this boy's whenever he wants it. He has always had all the money he wanted and could have had a —— sight more if he hadn't been too independent to take it. Taking all personal considerations out of it, why in —— would he bother around with a couple of hundred dollars' worth of opium?"

The old man looked around the circle belligerently. Colonel Feldmore, smoking quietly with his chair tipped back against the wall, smiled to himself. He had heard much of Roaring Bill MacDowell.

"Now, George Hickman——"

"The same thing goes for him," stated Tex quickly. "We've turned down movie contracts as high as a thousand a week, and George of course would have got most of it."

Captain Kennard nodded. He had seen the letters.

"It being settled in our own minds that these boys, not being complete and total idiots, wouldn't mess around and smuggle opium for what few dollars they could get——"

Roaring Bill interrupted himself suddenly and looked at the two colonels questioningly.

"Or maybe you don't agree. Speak up, colonel. What do you think?"

Tex was on his feet, the old half-humorous, half-mocking twist at the corners of his mouth.

"Dad, you're a —— good rancher and cattleman, but you don't know the Army. If we have the colonels' permission, Hickman and I will go."

"Very well," assented Colonel Mills. "Stay in your quarters for a while so that we can get you by telephone if we need you."

THE two flyers saluted and went out. Mr. MacDowell watched them, his eyes twinkling. Colonel Feldmore nodded slightly, as if in approval at the tact displayed by Tex in withdrawing.

"Now, gentlemen, what is your open opinion about this deal?"

The ranchman was not to be dissuaded from the point at issue for even a moment. For the first time Colonel Feldmore joined the conversation.

"It is the opinion of both Mills and myself that the boys are innocent. In fact, we have stronger reasons for believing so than you will have until you hear what Captain Kennard has got to say, unless your son has written you regarding his dealings with Dave Fitzpatrick."

"Mammy Hannah! Has that son-of-a-gun of a boy o' mine been mixed up with Dave Fitzpatrick?" roared the old man in a surprized bellow.

"He sure has," stated the captain. "And——"

"Excuse me, captain. Before we tell you, Mr. MacDowell, the very peculiar status of affairs, I want to have you thoroughly understand this. No matter how firmly we, as men or Army officers, believe in the innocence of those two fellows, we can not fail to press the charges unless they are quashed by incontrovertible evidence. We can not simply say they are innocent—that they have been framed by a powerful enemy. The Army men may have been lax about liquor. Civilians in San Antonio—a few of them—have raised a howl. A couple of ministers have mentioned it vaguely from the pulpit. The Evening Post, in its report of our last dance, grossly exaggerated the illumination of the participants, for humorous purposes. To make things worse, a complaint to the commanding general of the Department was made, and strict orders issued. Finally, through some pressure, the Department of Justice horned in to help us out. They were on hand this morning when the ship from McAllen came in."

"If that skunk Dave Fitzpatrick is after

Lee, he's got the power to start wheels turning in San Antone," declared the ranchman, the wrinkles between his eyes deepening until the bushy white eyebrows almost met over his prominent nose. "Probably that bird Snow was in the plot. He'd bear investigating."

"I don't doubt that. But you see where we stand. We've got to put up or shut up!" said Colonel Mills, taking up the thread of his chief's remarks. "Unless we can prove the innocence of the two lieutenants, it's bound to be a nasty mess."

"You're right, colonel. Now let's get the lay on this Fitzpatrick stuff. Twenty years ago, gentlemen, when that cold, brainy, crooked —— was a cattleman I caught him cheating in a stud-poker game at Palestine, Texas, and drove him out of the country. Since then he's become rich, I know, by every means known to man or devil. I've kind of lost track of his operations, but I know for a fact that he pulls wires down in that little Mexican joint he hangs out at that make at least one weak-backed, jelly-hearted, water-blooded nincompoop in Washington jump. Now, what about him and the boy?"

"Well, Mr. MacDowell," began the captain, "it's really a case of the deeds of the father being visited on the children, according to the dope old-timers like Sheriff Bill Trowbridge down at McMullen and Ayres of the Texas Rangers gave me. One time when Tex was bound for El Paso on a flying trip Ayres met him and gave him the news that Fitzpatrick was out to get him. Just what channels the news got to Ayres through I don't know. When Ayres found out that Tex was the son of 'Roaring Bill' MacDowell he figured right away that Fitzpatrick wanted to get back at the man who had been the means of his own disgrace by trying to run his son out of the country under a cloud.

"His actions have borne this out. He could have had Tex killed a hundred times, of course, by one of his gunmen. But there is nothing he has against Tex himself—there can be nothing. He tried one of his usual methods on him in El Paso—what he has done before to men whom he wanted to ruin. Three of his men—a Mexican, and two others named Searles and Beers——"

"Searles, eh?" interrupted MacDowell. "A —— good man gone wrong, let me tell you."

"Well, they got Tex into a poker game. Tex, through Ayres' warning, suspected the lay, but that infernal disposition of his to pit himself deliberately against heavy odds for the pure joy of taking a chance made him consent to play. He was watching closely for crooked work, and caught a switch in the decks. He got four aces pat, and figured that one of the others would have a straight flush to beat him. Everybody dropped out but him and Beers. Beers urged him to put in a couple of thousand dollars' worth of I. O. U.'s, so that he could demand payment at once and prosecute when they weren't paid, I suppose. Well, Tex took a chance that Beers' straight flush would not be pat—he figured that would be too raw—stayed in the pot, and finally threw away one of his four aces and drew two cards, thus spoiling Beers' draw if he had an open end straight-flush which the two top cards on the deck would fill—either one of them, I mean. You see no one would figure Tex to do anything but draw one or stand pat."

A roar of laughter burst from the old ranchman.

"Did Lee do that? How much did he win?"

"Around twenty-five hundred, I think," grinned Captain Kennard. "Ransom, one of my observers, was there and helped Tex gather up the money at the point of a gun before the three crooks could squeal. You see what Fitzpatrick was probably figuring—to get Tex into debt, demand full payment, and perhaps through holding a club over his head drive him into doing something through which Fitzpatrick could drive him out of the border country and out of the Army in disgrace. Sort of crooked justice for what you did to him, Mr. MacDowell."

"Dave sure got it plenty up around Palestine," agreed MacDowell. "Great Jemimah, but I'll bet that two thousand hurt the old snake worse than taking his right eye, long's he knew who the boy was."

The old man was still smiling delightedly as he digested the full perfection of his son's achievement. He looked at Colonel Feldmore with twinkling eyes.

"I taught that young sprig to play the great game of draw poker when he was eight years old, colonel, but —— if I don't believe the child is father to the man!"

"Apparently he's no sucker at the game," laughed the colonel.

"Not by a long shot—never was!" declared the ranchman. "He raised a lot of —— when he was around the ranch, but I couldn't very well object, havin' been somewhat of a poor church-member myself when young. I reckon it taught him something—nothing like experience."

He rolled another brown paper smoke, and his seamed and lined face gradually became serious.

"What you've told me, captain, is news to me," he resumed at length, speaking slowly as if carefully considering his words, "and in spite of the boy havin' come out on the big end of the horn once or twice, it's a —— serious thing for any man to have Dave Fitzpatrick out to get him!"

The three Army men nodded agreement.

"It was easy for Fitzpatrick to work this deal, too," said Captain Kennard. "By getting acquainted with some enlisted man his own employee could easily find out stuff, and slip in the hangar at night to plant the opium."

Mr. MacDowell nodded.

"Just what has happened, probably. Of course everybody that's been around Texas much knows that he's in cahoots with every bandit from Villa to Rentaria, and that he's got a gang of outlaws of every breed workin' for him up and down the border on his smuggling deals, but I'd give a pretty penny to know how many prominent judges, bankers and Government men are under his thumb."

The old Texan's eyes were on the glowing tip of his cigaret, and there was a reminiscent gleam in them as he continued:

"It worries me about the boy, because if there's any man in the world Fitzpatrick has reason to hate, it's me, gentlemen. And if he's planning to get back at me through Lee, it's time for the old man to get busy, *pronto*. There's nothing too low and sneaking for Fitzpatrick, and likewise nothing too bold or bloody."

"I personally knew three men—two Army officers and a customs man—who got something on Fitzpatrick and bucked him. They didn't get anywhere, and furthermore they all left the country, in disgrace."

Colonel Feldmore nodded agreement with Mills' words.

Mr. MacDowell got to his feet as if he had come to a decision.

"I'm getting to work tomorrow to try and clear this opium deal up. Not only that, but to clean Fitzpatrick up. He's been allowed to get away too long as it is. Funny thing how those things'll happen—a city will sit back and let a gang of crooks run it for years and never get up gumption enough to throw 'em out. Makes me laugh to have New York and those towns laugh at Texas. Difference in circumstances, that's all. I've got a little influence around this part of the country, and I'm starting to use it. A hundred of Fitzpatrick's men have been caught, but never a time has the old rattlesnake himself been burnt. Now, gentlemen, how long are you going to give me to work on this before the boy is court martialed? ——, I wish he'd 'a' told me about this before!"

"That's the trouble with him," opined Captain Kennard. "Why, Mr. MacDowell, that young fool actually enjoys being in a mess! If there's anything in the world he'll go miles to live through it's a scrap of any kind. He's——"

"Chip off the old block," laughed his father. "Never got out o' hot water myself till I got married. There's nothing better than a good scrap, but when the boy goes up against Dave Fitzpatrick it's a cold deck right from the go."

"I know it, and I've got something to suggest," said the Captain. "Tex is our engineer officer down at McMullen, and it would be a good thing for him to take the course at the Mechanics School, anyway. Inasmuch as this happening today shows clearly that Fitzpatrick is in deadly earnest about framing Tex, why wouldn't it be a good thing to order him up here, colonel, for that course, while he is awaiting trial? It would appear better in San Antonio, too, to have him right on the ground up here. Inasmuch as I think we all believe that it was Fitzpatrick who planted the whole deal, it's a dead cinch that he'll find ways to stimulate a continuous and loud bunch of protests if it appears that the case isn't being pressed. Tex will be away from the border, where Fitzpatrick's power is most absolute and where he would have every opportunity to plunge him still further into trouble, and his father here can start the wheels turning with a free mind. The idea won't appeal to Tex, but —— it, colonel, I think the world of that fellow and I know —— well that Fitzpatrick'll get him just as sure as —— unless we forget we're Army officers and look at it like men!"

The captain's plea was vehement and sincere, and both the other officers knew the truth of his words. Before they left the office that night it had been decided that Tex and George Hickman were to remain at Donovan Field, under orders, and that the time of their trial would be delayed as long as possible to give Mr. MacDowell a chance to use his wide power and influence to start things in motion to clear them from the charges.

"Understand, Mr. MacDowell," were Colonel Mills' parting words to the Texan, "As men we are behind you in what you believe; as Army officers, unless proof can be obtained to present to the court martial, we must press those charges and there isn't a chance in the world of the two boys' escaping, I'm afraid, unless we can find something that will convince others of what we are already convinced of. If they got by the Army court martial, you know that a civilian jury will be waiting for them."

"I understand perfectly, colonel," stated MacDowell senior. "Leave things to me. I'll trim Fitzpatrick again like I did twenty years ago, or my name isn't MacDowell. Now let's forget it. Listen!"

With exaggerated care he tiptoed from one to the other, whispering a few words in each man's ear. Broad smiles spread over the faces of the three as they listened.

"Twenty-year-old stuff, gentlemen!" he said aloud. "So shall we take Colonel Mills' suggestion here and adjourn to his quarters? I've still got that car out here—it's in a bag. I crave to moisten up!"

IV

IT WAS two weeks later when Tex, working busily in grimy overalls, was told that Major Stratton, commanding officer of the Mechanics School, wanted to see him immediately. Carruthers, officer in charge of the course for engineer officers, brought Tex the message. MacDowell was hard at work putting together the internal workings of a torn-down Liberty motor. The Mechanics School believed that for every lecture on the theory of motors there should be many hours devoted to getting the hands dirty and learning by actual experience.

"Good Lord, Carruthers, have I got to mosey down and clean up right now?" inquired Tex disgustedly.

"Unless you want to interview the Major in that spiffy suit of coveralls," replied Carruthers, who was a slight, good-looking fellow with a pair of sparkling brown eyes and a flashing smile that helped to make him one of the most popular men on the field.

He had been a senior in a prominent engineering school at the start of the war, and incidentally held one or two New England Intercollegiate records on the track.

"They may not be the glass of fashion," agreed Tex, carefully wiping and then wrapping up his tools, "but they're cool."

"I don't see why. They're so stiff with dirt you might as well be wearing a tin suit," retorted Carruthers. "I've got to report along with you, by the way."

"It's no hardship for you fashion plates in boots and breeches. Now we who labor with our hands——"

"Shut up and let's get started. I'll take you down to the quarters on the motorcycle so you can change."

Tex locked up his tools in a chest and then with Carruthers at his side walked down the long hangar, where dozens of students—commissioned and enlisted—were working busily under the guidance of instructors. Two lecture rooms at the far end were filled to overflowing with classes which were getting lecture periods. The Mechanics School was the mechanic-factory of the Air Service, and Major Stratton saw to it that production was fast and thorough.

Carruthers started the motorcycle and Tex folded up his long legs and eased himself into the sidecar. He showed no effects in his manner or face of the difficult two weeks that had passed since the discovery of opium in his ship. Being under confinement, he had not been off the field during that time, but for days the newspapers of San Antonio had played up the story, with vague hints of a huge smuggling conspiracy which was using Army airplanes to transport the contraband goods. The name MacDowell, hitherto prominent as the hero of many flying exploits, was spread across newspaper pages during those days as the first of many important criminals who would be taught a lesson.

In the Mechanics School itself, after the first day or two, Tex had effortlessly established himself as a "real guy." His whimsical humor, lack of conceit, and above all his refusal to allow the fact that he was in confinement for an important crime to affect either his sense of humor or his attitude toward his work, speedily convinced the busy young officers of the School that regardless of the fact that he might be guilty he was an addition to the gang. He won their money at poker, flew their scout ships as they had seldom been flown before and refused absolutely to discuss the charges against him in any way. Futhermore, no amount of pumping could persuade him to launch forth into tales of his achievements overseas or on the border. As a result, the attitude of the School's young men was expressed by "Slim" Evans a few days after they had all come to know the man of whom they had heard so much.

"He may be guilty, or he may not," stated Slim around the mess-table one night when Tex was absent, "and personally I don't give a —— whether he is or not!"

Which attitude Tex must have noticed, but if he did he gave no indication that he realized his peculiar position among his brother officers. Right now he was wondering whether the wheels were beginning to move. Had MacDowell, senior, accomplished anything? Carruthers being asked to report likewise, however, made it rather improbable that the major wanted to talk about the opium business.

Carruthers sat and smoked while Tex quickly bathed and dressed. The young engineer, only a fair pilot himself through lack of opportunity to make flying his chief business in the Army, was secretly a profound admirer of the seasoned veteran who was one of his motor students. Being of a sensitive disposition, he realized better than most of the others just how much poise and cold nerve it took for the Texan to conduct himself naturally, and carve a niche for himself in the Mechanics School under the circumstances. Jack Carruthers was for Tex, hook, line and sinker, and as they sped toward headquarters for the interview with the major he was almost hoping that it would be of such a nature as would give him an opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty.

Both men waited with interest for the major to bring up the subject of the interview. For a moment, however, he insisted on discussing with Tex the advantages of a sideslip landing. He had seen him make a beauty that morning, and, unlike most high-ranking officers, the major was a real flyer himself, which meant that he was ready to discuss flying at all times when a kindred soul was around to discuss it with him.

Finally he came to the reason for asking the two men to report.

"Captain Barrett, from Washington, took a ship from here to fly to the Corbett Ranch two days ago," he said. "We sent old Sergeant Correll along with him. Well, the captain got lost in a fog and landed near a town called Ausman, Texas, down on the Gulf of Mexico. It was muddy and he turned over on his back. Broke the prop, a wheel, jimmed up the rudder and various other minor injuries. The captain had to get back to Washington, so he left Correll with the plane.

"We've got to send down a ship with the needed supplies, and two pilots, one to fly each ship back. Our officers are pretty busy, so I figured it would help us out if we could pull you out of school for a week—you would just drop down a class, you see—and send you as one of the pilots, MacDowell."

"I'd sure like to go, major, but being a criminal—" drawled Tex with a rising inflection at the end.

The young major grinned.

"I know. Colonel Mills was a little afraid of doing it, but Colonel Feldmore said he was getting fed up on all the lambasting San Antonio was giving the Air Service in general and you in particular, and that I could send you and be —— to what anybody thought. However, we are going to make a concession to public opinion and appoint the other pilot—Carruthers if he wants to go—technically your guard while you're away."

Tex shook his head doubtfully.

"He's so little, major. My ——, think what a temptation I'd be under to escape!"

"Get tough with me and I'll show you," threatened Carruthers. "I'd sure like to go, sir," he added to the major.

"I thought you would—your job doesn't give you much chance for cross-country work, and in addition your knowledge of motors may help Correll in fixing up the ship. It's been out there in the mud too long to be in good shape."

He reached over his desk and handed Tex a slip of paper.

"Here are all the directions for finding the field which Correll has picked out as suitable for you to land on. It's practically next to the place where the captain cracked up, and about a mile out of town. Ausman isn't on most maps—it's just a little place, I guess, but a branch line of the railroad that goes through Barnes City has just recently been put through, according to Correll. You can follow that railroad to Acacia, and from there the branch line to Ausman, which isn't on our maps. It's right on the Gulf."

"When do you wish us to start, sir?" asked Tex, folding up the paper and putting it in his pocket.

"Tomorrow morning. Johnson will give you a ship. Better take a Jenny with an H motor—no use of taking chances with one of these overbalanced DHs on a short trip. You can land at the Government field at Barnes City for gas."

The young major watched the two flyers go out, with a satisfied smile. He wondered whether Tex suspected that his C. O. had deliberately pulled wires to give him the trip. Mrs. Stratton was a Texas girl, and familiar with what the name MacDowell had meant in Texas since old Roaring Bill had first become a cattleman back in the eighties. Not that Mrs. Stratton could remember the eighties, but her father had many a tale to tell of the old days when he and MacDowell, senior, and a few other hardy souls had fought their way by main strength to a commanding position in the Lone Star State.

The major himself was not in charge of the most important single activity of the Air Service for nothing—he knew men and he agreed thoroughly with his wife that in all probability Tex was a most unfortunate victim of circumstances. The C. O. turned back to his work in a righteous glow—that assignment would mean something to MacDowell in more ways than one.

It did, and in more ways than even the major could possibly have in mind.

V

THEIR sturdy training-plane was well loaded down next morning when MacDowell and Carruthers took off. A propeller was wired to one wing, next to the fuselage. A spare wheel took up most of the available space in the undercarriage, tied between struts. A rudder was tied securely to the other wing, in such a manner that it did not rest on its base and twist out of shape. A suitcase holding the toilet kits and a change of linen for the two flyers was strapped next to the rudder. In the back cockpit a tool kit, extra spark plugs, new distributor brushes and other small, easily broken and vitally important parts of an aviation motor were stuffed beneath the seat.

It was a gray, cloudy day, although it was not cold and the clouds were high. The wind was blowing southeast from the Gulf, which meant that the hundred-and-seventy mile trip would be made in slow time.

As always when he was flying anything but the heavy, overpowered, unbalanced DeHaviland, Tex felt carefree. The DeHaviland is so infinitely more difficult to land safely in the event of a forced landing, due to its weight and high landing speed, plus the fact that its undercarriage is set too far back and the plane will nose up at the slightest provocation, that almost any other ship seems like "pie" to a pilot accustomed to DeHavilands.

His map was fastened in front of him, tacked down on a mapboard. At two thousand feet he picked up the railroad to Barnes City, throttled his hundred-and-eighty horsepower motor to 1,450 r.p.m., and flew southeast. There were plenty of large fields if the motor went bad, although water was discernible in many of them. It had rained the night before.

Barnes City where they were to make the first stop, was the eighth town down the railroad, marked by a reservoir. The field, maintained by the Government as a landing-place for cadets on their practice cross-country flights, was next to the reservoir.

They picked up the field without trouble, and Tex spiraled down slowly while he gave the landing-ground a careful scrutiny. There was a pool of water at one end, but otherwise it looked fairly hard. The approach for a landing into the wind was directly over the town. At a thousand feet over the town he cut the throttle to idling, and cocked up the Jenny until it was in an almost vertical bank. Top rudder started it to slipping down with very little forward speed. He leveled out at a hundred feet and glided slowly, dropping over the trees at the edge of the field and stalling down to the ground. A slow landing is good policy in any strange field—a small bump or a very shallow ditch may wreck a fast-landing ship. Townspeople could be seen standing in the middle of the streets watching the sight that never seems to lose novelty—an airplane in flight.

The field was short the way they landed—less than a hundred and fifty yards, but the slow landing caused them to stop rolling with half the space unused. Tex taxied to the edge of the road which ran by the field, and had just cut his motor when the gas truck from a garage which supplied Government ships with high-test gas came bouncing along the rough highway. It was a matter of only a few minutes to refill the half-empty gas and oil tanks, make out the necessary vouchers and get the ship cranked for the warm-up.

Carruthers placed a couple of sizeable rocks under the wheels for blocks and then sat on the tail while MacDowell warmed the motor. At about eight hundred revs. it missed and backfired a few times, but quickly caught again and ran smoothly when he finally opened the throttle wide for a few seconds. Tex turned to Carruthers and nodded. The motor man crawled beneath the wings, picked out the stones and then climbed to his seat and strapped himself in.

Tex gave it the gun slowly. He was taking off toward the reservoir—it would be a cross-wind take-off, but it gave him the long way of the field and a Jenny is slow getting off the ground. For a moment the motor missed and then caught again smoothly. The ship left the ground and was twenty-five feet high as it reached the edge of the two-hundred-yard square reservoir. Tex threw it into a left-hand bank for a turn back toward the field. Without any warning one bank of cylinders cut completely out and there was a loud report as the motor backfired.

The reservoir was surrounded by trees and shrubbery. There was but one opening, scarcely twenty-five feet wide, directly in front of them. Like a flash Tex nosed down his ship and dived for the opening. There was no hope of getting over the tops of the trees. Carruthers, in the back seat, pushed up his goggles and protected his face with his arm, preparing for the inevitable crash. Their wing spread was forty-seven feet—the opening little more than half that much.

Tex dived steeply for speed—he was skimming the water twenty yards away from the aperture in the trees. One bank of cylinders lent them a little aid. As he sped closer to his goal he took the desperate chance that he had decided on an instant after the motor's failure. He banked steeply, his ship so close to the ground that the lower wing tip was barely a foot above the earth. The tiniest slip—which seemed inevitable as the ship lost speed—would cause the wing to catch the ground.

The banked ship curved through the narrow opening, and with all the flying sense the years had given him Tex fought to keep it in the air. They were scarcely through the screen of bushes when he jammed the stick over the other way to bring it back to level. He was just too late—the right wheel hit the ground first and they bounced eight feet, cocked up to the right and almost stalled in the air.

With the instinct of a born flyer, however, Tex anticipated the action of the ship and had pushed the stick forward almost before the bounce occurred. He caught the ship in time, and it landed correctly instead of nose-diving the eight feet, which it would have done had there been a split second's delay in nosing down when the ship bounced. Had it reached the height of the bounce before the action of the controls caught it, flying speed would have been completely gone.

THE whole maneuver had taken about five seconds, and had been a series of instantaneous decisions, any one of which meant the difference between a wreck and possible safety. The ship stopped rolling a few feet from an irrigation ditch, one of several that cut the field. The wheels were an inch deep in the soft ground—had the ground not been so saturated with moisture they would have rolled into the ditch and all MacDowell's efforts gone for naught.

Tex pushed up his goggles and turned to look at Carruthers.

"So this is Paris!" he observed.

Carruthers drew a deep breath.

"Excuse me if I seem to act peculiar," he replied with a deep breath. "But I was shaking hands with St. Peter and just let go."

As they climbed out of the ship a man came running toward them, leading a group of men, women and children from near-by houses who had heard the motor go bad.

"Can't take off in this field, if we can fix the ship," said Tex disgustedly. "Got to drag the —— thing back to the regular field someway. I wonder what in —— got into the thing?"

"A carburetor jet completely plugged, I think," replied the motor expert, opening the door at the side of the motor cowling.

"I hope that's all. Say, that reservoir looks about as small as a pond now, but it sure made the Pacific Ocean look like a dewdrop when that bank cut, didn't it?" drawled Tex, manufacturing the inevitable cigaret as he watched the breathless approach of a rapidly growing crowd of curious bystanders.

When they arrived Carruthers was busy with a jet wrench, removing the high-speed jet from the carburetor which fed the delinquent bank of cylinders. While Tex conversed with the gathering his comrade got out the jet, and discovered a piece of rubber tubing which had been sucked from one of the hose connections in the gasline and had tightly plugged the tiny jet. It was removed easily by means of a piece of wire. In twenty minutes the restarted motor ran perfectly.

Tex cut the switches and climbed out.

"Now how are we going to get this ship around the reservoir to where we can take off?" he inquired of all and sundry. "I wonder what the chances of hiring about four good mules are?"

A big, sunburnt man in overalls and a Mexican straw sombrero expectorated a young cloudburst of tobacco juice before replying,

"I'm shy o' mules right now, but I own this field and I've got a tractor that might do the job. We got to cross a brook, though."

"Fine!" chorused the flyers. A tractor would simplify things immensely.

"We sure will appreciate your helping us," Tex told their benefactor heartily.

"It's all right—had a boy was a mechanic in the flying corps," returned the farmer. "From what he told me and what I've seen right around this field you flyers've got enough to tend to in the air without haulin' ships around on the ground!"

Soon the tractor came rolling along over the field, and the tail of the ship was hoisted and tied to it. It was not all easy sailing, however—two of the impromptu bridges that the flyers, aided by kind-hearted onlookers, built across the brook running into the reservoir promptly broke. It was after one o'clock when the ship was finally resting on the field, and the flyers gratefully accepted the invitation of Mr. Cole, their chief helper, to have dinner with him.

During the course of the hearty meal that stout, motherly Mrs. Cole served them her husband inquired—

"Goin' back to San Antone now?"

"No, we're trying hard to get to the city of Ausman, Texas," returned Tex, who was stowing away hot biscuits with much gusto.

"Ausman, eh? That sure is a right funny town," observed their host. "Ever been there?"

"No—a fellow cracked up down there and we're after his ship," Carruthers told him.

"Somebody had a narrow escape from coming after us," stated Tex, leaning back with a satisfied sigh. "I wouldn't mind working like I did this morning as a steady diet if there were meals like this around."

Mrs. Cole beamed with pride at the compliment to her cooking.

"What's the matter with Ausman?" inquired Carruthers, offering Cole a cigaret which was rejected in favor of a huge corncob pipe.

"Nothing special. Just looks and seems funny. I was in there once trying to buy some cottonseed I heard a fellow down there had, and everybody down there seemed to be figurin' what I was doin' around the town. Made me feel like everybody was lookin' at me crossways. Drummers comin' through here said they never had sold anything to the big store down there—sometimes a new man goes over from Acacia, but he soon gets cured. I never felt so much like I'd butted in on a party where I wasn't invited in my life."

"Well, with a little luck I guess we'll get in and out fast," stated MacDowell, rising from the table.

"Maybe you won't want to," laughed Cole, refilling his big pipe. "I was only there a few hours, but I smelt a lot of breaths and they was sure strong enough so you could hang your hat on 'em. Hooch flows free in that town, or I'm a liar."

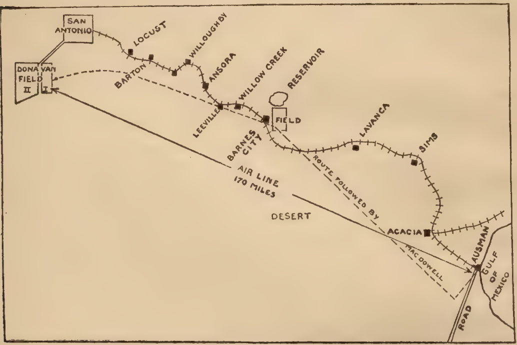
The two flyers made their adieu and departed after thanking Mr. and Mrs. Cole profusely for their kindness. As they walked the few hundred yards to the field Carruthers remarked:

"Sounds like Ausman might be a little more interesting than the average Texas town. If it is, it'll be the first good town I ever got into *via* the air. Every time I get stranded I find it's one of those movies-once-a-week places."

"If the demon rum is prominent there, you're going to have a —— of a job to hold your prisoner," returned Tex.

"Go ahead. If you haven't learned not to fool with contraband goods by this time, you're a hardened criminal and beyond redemption."

It was the first time MacDowell's status had been alluded to, even in joking vein. Although neither man betrayed his feelings, the facetious conversation had a sobering effect. During those last two weeks Tex, almost without realizing it, had been gradually changing his attitude. All his life he had met—even courted—danger, a contest of any kind, with a queer kind of delight that was a part of him.



He had deliberately walked into Fitzpatrick's net at El Paso for the pure joy of pitting himself against a powerful enemy, and outwitting him. Once again, when Fitzpatrick had nearly succeeded in robbing him of an invention which he, and Sergeant Cary of McMullen, had developed, he had outwitted his powerful enemy.

Now, as they silently approached the ship, he had commenced to realize something of the relentless enmity, the cold, implacable purpose of the man who was the most feared influence on the border. Carruthers' light words had brought home to him once more the fact which no one realized better than himself—that one Lee MacDowell was under the shadow of a menacing cloud that bid fair to engulf him.

Unless his powerful father could succeed in running to earth proof enough to show beyond question of a doubt that the apparently open-and-shut evidence of the opium-laden ship was the work of Dave Fitzpatrick, his Army career was done and there might be a couple of years in Leavenworth.

It was incongruous that full realization of what he had to fight should come to him right then, he reflected, but as he climbed in the cockpit and switched on the ignition to start the motor he failed to underestimate the odds against him for the first time in his life.

Which was something that would have caused great satisfaction to Captain Kennard, back at McMullen, who knew MacDowell better than the reckless young Texan knew himself.

VI

TEN minutes of flying proved that the motor was in excellent condition once more, so Tex decided to lop off a few miles of the trip by flying a straight airline, leaving the railroad. It went straight east for forty miles and then bent sharply southward to Acacia. Ausman was southeast of Acacia. The map showed a small river which would serve as a landmark on a straight course for their destination.

It was a deserted strip of country, that fifty miles. One tiny group of buildings, probably belonging to a ranchman, was the only evidence of human habitation that the two airmen could discern. At intervals herds of cattle could be seen, standing out sharply in the clear air, even from five thousand feet.

Finally the river bent northward, and there was no landmark to guide them. Tex flew due southeast by his compass. As the flying-time from Barnes City grew to fifty minutes and then an hour Tex scanned the country ahead anxiously. The railroad running south of Ausman should be in sight by then—the Gulf itself only a few miles farther on.

A white streak ahead became visible. It was a highway, running almost north and south. The pilot studied his map carefully. It was evidently the highway which approached Ausman from the south. He had drifted too far to the south while flying without landmarks on the ground to guide him. Perhaps the prevailing wind at five thousand feet had been from the north and blown them off course. At any rate, they could not be far from their goal. Ten miles further eastward the waters of the Gulf could be seen shimmering through the light ground haze.

He banked around to follow the road northward. It was wide, and looked as if it was smooth and level. It was probably a boulevard used by the big Summer colony at Corpus Christi, many miles south, for automobiling.

As he flew above the road he noticed two automobiles, coming from opposite directions. The one going north toward Ausman was traveling very fast. The other car, a much smaller one, was proceeding slowly. Both Tex and Carruthers watched the two cars idly. It was pleasant to have some evidence of inhabited country after the long jaunt over the trackless, lonesome wastes they had just traversed.

As the two cars approached each other the fast-running one did not slow down. Like two toys they sped toward each other, and the flyers watched helplessly as they saw the smaller car skid, topple and finally turn over beside the road. The big car had collided with it.

Tex cut the throttle half-way and dived recklessly for the ground. The wires screamed with the speed, but not until the struts were shaking and the whole ship vibrating wildly did Tex pull up the nose for a minute to reduce it. Then he cocked up the ship in a vertical bank and with full top rudder sent it into a wicked sideslip that made them drop like a stone. The side wind blew his goggles around with its force and he was compelled to hold them in place with his hand.

In the back seat Carruthers had his eyes glued to the nasty looking wreck below. The big car had stopped and the figure of a man could be seen approaching the mangled little victim of his reckless driving. There was no sign of life from beneath the wreckage.

As they sped earthward Tex looked anxiously for a place to land. The country was swampy and isolated clumps of bushes effectually spoiled any of the open places for airplane-landing purposes. The pilot hoped that the big car was all right and that he would not be forced to land, for prospects were very bad.

They were only fifteen hundred feet high when he felt Carruthers' hand gripping his shoulder. He turned, and Carruthers pointed down excitedly.

"A woman," were the syllables his lips formed, and Tex stuck his head far over the side of the cockpit, holding his goggles to prevent their turning in the terrific air blast generated by the dive.

Sure enough, the figure of a woman in some sort of a white blouse was discernible now, and the man seemed to be simply standing beside her. Certainly he was not trying to help her.

It was a layout that demanded a little investigation, Tex decided, but where on earth could he land with any chance of safety? There was not a possible place, unless——

He scanned the road keenly. There were no wires or trees to hinder, and it was plenty wide enough. The few bushes seemed to be far enough back so that wings would clear them. Instantly he decided to risk it.

A half-mile back of the two cars he was directly over the road, a hundred feet high. He cut the throttle completely, and glided slowly. The southeast wind started to drift him a little, so he nosed into it and came down with his ship pointed slightly diagonal to the wide, straight highway. One comforting thing in his ticklish job was that the ditches alongside the road were eight feet from the edge of the road proper, and apparently very shallow.

Carruthers, despite his realization of the difficulty of what Tex was attempting, felt as safe as if he had been in church, as he afterward expressed it. Somehow or other he had abounding confidence in the man who was piloting him—more than he would have had in himself, which is the highest compliment one pilot can pay another. Probably fifty per cent. of flyers refuse absolutely to ride with anybody but themselves at the stick.

Tex almost stalled his ship five feet from the roadway. As it dropped he kicked the rudder so that the nose was pointed directly down the road. Although they hit hard, it was on three points and they did not bounce. Peering ahead with his head over the side to give him better vision, Tex worked his rudder desperately to keep the ship going straight as it lost speed and the controls began to become ineffective.

He was lucky—when the ship started to come to a stop it did not take a notion to deviate from its straight path. Had it started to turn, he would have been forced to turn on the throttle to make the controls effective, and if they had not worked immediately the extra speed would have meant a crack-up in a ditch.

They had scarcely stopped rolling, a few hundred yards from the cars, when Carruthers was out of the cockpit. He grabbed the left hand wing, out at the end, and walked along as Tex taxied slowly forward. By alternately pulling or pushing on his wing Carruthers helped keep the plane rolling straight, and in a moment they were close by the heap of torn metal that represented the woman's car.

Tex left the motor idling and followed Carruthers at a run. The man was now kneeling alongside the woman, who was stretched partly beneath the wreckage. He swayed a little as he leaned over her, his back to the approaching airmen.

As they came up to him he turned and looked up. Apparently he was either a Mexican or at least a half-breed. He was stout, with a dark, full face that was now flushed with liquor. It was a girl who was stretched unconscious on the ground, and her shirtwaist and skirt were torn and dirty. Not until they were right beside the drunkenly leering Mexican did the two army men see that one of his hands rested on a white shoulder which was exposed by the torn blouse.

Carruthers grabbed the Mexican by the collar and jerked him to his feet. He drew back his foot and with all the strength he had sent the Mexican sprawling with a well-placed kick. Tex bent over the girl anxiously. An ugly clot of blood on her head might mean almost anything, but the limp, unnaturally bent arm told its own story. It was broken.

He looked up in time to see the Mexican, who was dressed flashily, climb to his feet. His face was contorted with drunken rage. He started for Carruthers, tugging at a gun in his hip pocket. He did not notice Tex as the flyer leaped for him. A crashing blow behind the ear sent him to earth once more, and this time he lay still. Tex abstracted his gun and rolled him to the side of the road.

"Thanks, Tex," said Carruthers briefly.

"Her arm's broken and she may have anything from a fractured skull to just a bruise on her head," stated Tex, as they bent over the victim of the accident.

She was very young and more than ordinarily good looking, although now the oval face was chalk-white beneath a tumbling mass of auburn hair that shone like fire in the sunlight.

Carruthers wet his handkerchief with water from the ditch and carefully washed away the blood from the girl's head. It was starting to clot over an ugly gash just over her left ear. Apparently, however, the wound was not serious, but the misshapen arm was pitifully obvious.

"I feel as helpless as a —— baby!" groaned Carruthers. "How far are we from Ausman, anyway?"

"About fifteen miles, I think," returned Tex. "We've got to get her back someway. If that spig's car is all right, you can drive her to Ausman."

"Had we better try to bring her to?"

"I don't believe so. That arm will probably give her —— if she comes out of her faint, and we might as well let her alone. I'll take a look at the car."

Carruthers, who had the girl's head in his lap, bandaged the cut on her head while

Tex started for the car. He was doomed to disappointment. One wheel was crazily askew and two blown tires showed that the big machine must have skidded wildly after hitting the other car.

"Nothing doing," yelled Tex as he came back. "I wonder if anybody ever drives along this —— forsaken pike?"

"Apparently not. But we've got to do something, Tex."

"Your words are as true as gospel, me lad, but starting from there—what?"

He looked at the girl speculatively and then at the softly idling ship. Carruthers caught his unspoken thought.

"Could we fly her in, do you think?"

"I believe we could," decided Tex, his eyes on the road that stretched away as straight as a string for miles. "You'd have to hold her in, though."

"What about landing? My ——, if anything should happen——"

"I've got full directions for the field, and old Correll knows enough to pick a good one. It hasn't been raining here since yesterday, either. Probably he'll be out to meet us in a car, and we can rush her to a doctor."

"All right—let's go."

Carruthers gently eased himself away from the girl and propped up her head on a cushion which Tex supplied. They ran for the ship and each took one side of the tail. They lifted it a few inches off the ground and carefully swung it around, careful not to raise it too high, for in that event the revolving propeller would hit the ground. When it was pointed down the road they came back to the girl.

"What do you think about a sling for that arm?" inquired Tex. "I believe it ought to be bound up, too."

They finally took two pieces of board and bound up her arm in a rough splint. Tex ripped off his O. D. shirt and made a sling out of it. The girl stirred as they were applying the rough surgery, but apparently did not regain consciousness.

They were preparing to carry her to the ship when Tex remarked—

"If we're going to town it might be wise to—er—cover up the young lady."

Carruthers grinned.

"Here's where I lose my shirt, too, I guess," he said as he took it off.

It was needed, for there was very little shirtwaist left and much creamy skin exposed.

They slipped Carruthers' O.D. shirt over the girl's head, putting only her uninjured arm through a sleeve. They had just completed the operation when her eyelids fluttered and opened and a pair of big hazel eyes looked up and met Carruthers' brown ones with startled inquiry. Before she could speak a spasm of pain twisted her features.

"Oh—my arm!" she said faintly.

"It got pretty badly hurt in that crash," replied Carruthers, settling her head more comfortably on his shoulder. "Don't try to move it at all."

"Take care of her while I yank the stick out of the back seat," Tex told him. "With two of you in there that stick wouldn't move a foot."

The girl's eyes followed the tall flyer as he strode rapidly toward the ship. Then they returned to Carruthers' face.

"You landed when you saw the wreck?" she asked.

Her face was very white; but she gave no other indication of pain.

"You bet we did—and we're going to get you to a doctor by airplane, too," rejoined the Army man.

He smiled engagingly as he looked down at the face that was turned upward to meet his eyes. She smiled back, and then apparently for the first time noticed her peculiar wardrobe and the sleeveless shirt worn by the man who was holding her. Carruthers caught her puzzled questioning look and rapidly sketched the events of the past few moments for her. He did not tell her about the fracas with the Mexican. He had just finished as Tex returned, his powerful shoulders and long, sinewy arms showing almost as brown as his face against the white of his shirt.

"We're ready to ramble, I guess," he stated. "How is the damsel in distress?"

"Fine, thank you," responded the girl with a crooked little smile.

Tex grinned appreciatively at the gameness displayed by the delicate-appearing young woman.

"You don't object to a ride in the plane, do you?" he asked as he and Carruthers lifted her gently to carry her to the ship. "The quicker a doctor gets hold of you the quicker that pain is going to stop."

"I think it will almost be worth a broken arm," she told them as they slowly walked toward the ship.

"Climb in, Jack, and I'll strap you," said

Tex, and held the girl in his arms as Carruthers loosened his hold and quickly climbed in.

As soon as he was strapped securely Tex lifted his burden over the side of the cockpit and lowered her into Jack's lap. Careful as they were, the girl's face went white with pain as MacDowell's arm stirred the sling. She leaned back lifelessly as Tex tucked her feet as far back as possible to avoid the possibility of jamming the controls in the rear cockpit. Carruthers had his hands locked around her, he himself held in securely by the strap.

Tex climbed into the front cockpit and strapped himself. Before starting he took another brief look at the directions Correll had sent for the field. It was marked by a big barn on one side and the mechanic would have a T contructed in the best part of the field. The wrecked ship would be in an adjoining field.

He slowly turned on the throttle. The take-off presented much less difficulty than the landing on the road, because the ship would be going at top speed, and even on the ground would readily answer the controls. It was comparatively easy for him to keep it straight down the road by gentle use of the rudder, although once he had to swerve slightly to avoid hitting a bush with his wing. Speed was picked up quickly on the hard surface, and they were safely off the ground in a hundred yards.

AS THEY circled around toward Ausman Tex glanced down and saw the Mexican walking slowly toward his damaged automobile. The pilot watched his instruments with tense interest. He did not dare to let himself think of what a forced landing would mean. Even the road was not a possibility now, for the shrubbery seemed to be closer and the ditches deeper as they came in sight of a small village that must be Ausman.

They were fifteen hundred feet high, and as they came closer to town a big white T loomed up plainly. Tex blessed the wise old sergeant who knew that a T was the one best bet in landmarks from the air. The barn was there, too, and in another field the wrecked ship, now right-side up, could be plainly seen. Several cars were standing on the narrow little road that ran past the field, branching off from the main pike.

As he spiraled down with half-throttled motor Tex flew more carefully than he ever had before, striving to counteract the bumps in the air so that the girl would be jarred as little as possible. In the back seat Carruthers, holding his burden tightly, was indulging in silent paens of praise and admiration. Scarcely once did the ship tilt sharply—Tex was literally catching it before it started. And in the blaze of the afternoon sun the air was in a highly scrambled condition as they came down to five hundred feet.

The field looked good. The portion where the T was located was apparently level and dry, although at one end of the long, narrow stretch a sizeable pool of water could be seen. The smoke from Ausman chimneys was rising almost straight in the air, Tex noted, so the wind was of little consequence.

He circled carefully well back from the southern boundary of the field and with his hand on the throttle started a very gradual dive. Imperceptibly the throttle crawled back farther and farther, the nose coming down slightly to compensate.

The shot for the field could not have been more accurate. They skimmed the fence at about fifty-five miles an hour, and Tex leveled off with his wheels almost touching the ground. He inched the tail back and landed as smoothly as it is humanly possible to set a ship down. It stopped opposite the line-up of cars, so it was only a short taxi to the nearest one. Tex looked around as he fed the throttle slowly, the ship barely moving across the ground.

The girl's face was deathly white below Carruthers' huge goggles, which obscured everything except the tip of her nose, her mouth and chin; but she managed a smile, nevertheless.

Correll was in the van of the group of people who had come out to see the landing. Tex wasted no time in cutting his switches, smiling in spite of himself at the stark astonishment pictured on the faces of the dozen or so people who surrounded the ship. Correll, a huge, portly man whose massive legs looked like tree-trunks in Army breeches and leggings, was speechless.

"There was an auto wreck and we brought this girl in," said Tex crisply as he climbed out. "Will the person who has the biggest, easiest riding car volunteer to take her home and some one else to go for a doctor?"

"Why, its Corinne Weston!" exclaimed a motherly looking woman as Tex and

Correll lifted the girl out and removed her goggles. "I'll take her home, poor dear!"

"How far does she live from here?" asked Tex as they carried her to the big touring-car the woman was driving.

"About a mile—on the outskirts of town," she replied breathlessly, bustling wildly to get robes out of the way in the back seat. "I'm all alone—maybe one o' you gentlemen better come along to hold her and help her into the house. It isn't likely her daddy will be home."

"Go ahead, Jack. I'll be over to get my shirt back in a few minutes," said Tex.

Carruthers, who had been unconscious of his lightly clad condition, flushed red as fire, glancing quickly at the portly lady who was already at the wheel of the car. The little knot of curious people laughed at his dismayed expression.

"Land's sake, boy, hop in and don't be silly," said the lady. "I see where your shirts went."

As soon as Miss Weston and her caretaker were ensconced as comfortably as circumstances permitted in the roomy back seat she started the car slowly. Tex, who had been somewhat dubious as to whether she could handle the car smoothly enough to avoid unnecessary pain to the injured girl, nodded approvingly. The big machine had started without a jerk.

"She'll do," he told Correll. "Has anybody gone after a doctor?"

"Jim Peebles went," volunteered a straw-sombreroed youth with a freckled face and bare feet.

"How did you get out here, sergeant?" asked Tex as they walked back to the ship.

"I've got a jitney here—that kid in the big hat drives me around a lot and is tickled to death at the chance," replied Correll. "What happened, lieutenant?"

Tex told him the story as they adjusted the canvas cover on the motor and propellor and staked down the tail and wingskids with the stakes Correll had provided.

"Was that spig a heavy-set, flashy-dressed *hombre* driving an old model Roamobile?" inquired Correll when Tex had finished.

"Can't swear to the make of the car, but otherwise the description fits," drawled the flyer, leaning against the fuselage and rolling a smoke.

Correll glanced at the few people who were still watching them from the road.

"That would be Balovo, that runs a combination saloon, gambling-place and pool room," he said in low tones as he turned the cushions in the cockpits. "He's one of the big toads in this puddle—and a —— peculiar puddle it is, too."

"So a fellow was telling me up at Barnes City," replied Tex, rubbing one hand reflectively up and down his bare arm. "What seems to be the lay?"

"Nothing special, except that it looks to be sort of a wide-open joint. It's a teeny little place, as you can see, but there's something funny about it. Awful lot o' spigs here, and hardly a single negro. Pretty rough sort of a gang o' whites, and about half of 'em don't seem to be doing a thing to justify living. They hang around the main stem all afternoon and evening."

"Well, I guess we won't be here long. How's the ship coming?"

"Pretty well, but there's a lot to be done yet. Motor's still on the blink. It was on its back in that mud too long. We just got her right side up yesterday, and the whole fuselage has got to be re-rigged."

"Well, we'll get at it bright and early in the morning. Is there a tractor to haul the thing out of that swamp and over here?"

"Nary a one. Have to do it by mules. Most of the people around here ain't so —— helpful, either. Do you want to go to Mr. Weston's house, lieutenant?"

"Yes—got to have my shirt. You haven't got a coat or anything out here, have you?"

"My coveralls," grinned Correll, and led Tex to the battered Ford which was the private Air Service taxi.

The coveralls proved to be not quite long enough and much too big around, but they were better than nothing. Correll went back to the ship and got the suitcases.

The field was about a mile and a half from the center of town, and to the west. Mr. Weston lived a little farther out, his big white house nearly a quarter mile from its nearest neighbor, although a couple of small shacks were near-by that might be inhabited. The house was discernible from some distance.

"This Weston seems to be the real wealthy plutocrat of town," Correll told Tex as they bumped along the uneven little road that led to the highway. "He owns the big store—the only one in the town worth mentioning. He lends money, buys the crops of all these Mexicans, has the post-office and hasn't got any competition, near's I can find out."

"He's got a lot of *dinero*," volunteered the driver, spitting over the side of the car.

"Apparently they learn to chew tobacco young in this town," grinned Tex.

"Ye-ah—I been chewin' since I was a little tyke," stated the youth proudly.

"Who's your daddy?" inquired Tex.

"He runs the hotel." answered the boy.

Correll leaned over to whisper in MacDowell's ear.

"I've been the only guest since I been here. They don't grow fat keepin' a hotel in this town, and yet that's more than most of the white men seem to be doing. Lieutenant, this sure is a funny town!"

VII

THE rattling little car rolled up the driveway, one of the most respectable lawns in that part of Texas showing green and level on either side. A few gnarled mesquite trees relieved the dead flatness. On the veranda was Carruthers, now arrayed once more in his wonted O.D. shirt, and another man. The big car which had transported them there was still standing in front, as was also a runabout.

Tex climbed out and ascended the steps.

"How is she getting on?" he asked, his eyes on the face of the tall, extremely thin man who rose to meet him.

"The doctor is with her now. He says she's all right except for the arm," returned the civilian.

He spoke in somewhat breathless, hurried fashion far different from MacDowell's soft half-drawl.

"Tex MacDowell, meet Mr. Weston," cut in Carruthers. "And here's a shirt to cover your nakedness."

"Already covered. Glad to meet you, Mr. Weston."

The thin, bony hand which was held out to him was cold as ice. Mr. Weston met his eyes for just a moment and then turned away nervously. Although apparently still a man in early middle age, his hair was sprinkled with gray and the small mustache and Vandyke that he wore were likewise sprinkled with white. He was dressed neatly in light Summer stuff and a soft white shirt and white shoes. His Panama was hung on the back of his chair.

"Sit down, sit down, lieutenant. Mr.—er—Carruthers tells me that you're the man that used to be at McMullen."

"Ye-es?"

MacDowell's remarkably large, wide-set gray eyes began to glow strangely as he uttered that one word questioningly. The merchant's question had brought back to him in a rush just who he was, and the shadow under which he was living. He waited quietly for whatever Mr. Weston might have to say.

Their host smoked his cigar in spasmodic jerks for a moment, one foot tapping on the porch floor.

"Well, gentlemen," he said at length, "of course there is nothing I can possibly say to let you know how much I appreciate what you have done. It was splendid—splendid. If I could I would invite you here, but now that Corinne will be laid up, I don't see how I can—don't see how I can."

He jumped to his feet and began taking long, quick strides up and down the veranda.

"Lieutenant MacDowell, there's something I must tell you. I——"

Footsteps in the hall grew nearer, and the doctor's voice could be heard as he talked in low tones to some one with him.

"—her quiet today, and then tomorrow she'll feel better," he said, and stepped out of the door in company with the slight, white-haired little woman, who had kept house for the Westons since Mrs. Weston's death some years before.

The doctor, rather a hard-faced man but apparently genial enough, told Mr. Weston that his daughter could walk around in a few days and that the injury to the arm was the only thing at all serious which had been caused by the wreck. Both he and Mrs. Talbot, who had driven Corinne and Carruthers from the field, treated Mr. Weston with evident respect.

"Did you say you had something you wanted to say to me?" asked Tex after the doctor and Mrs. Talbot had driven away.

Mr. Weston glanced nervously at the little white-haired housekeeper, who was chatting with Carruthers.

"Come down to the store," he said, his eyes gleaming somewhat feverishly,

"If you'll pardon me, I'll just step into the hall a minute and take off this flying-lingerie in favor of my shirt," said Tex to the little housekeeper during a lull in her conversation with Jack.

"Certainly, certainly, go right in," she said briefly and returned to her tale of the young girlhood of Corinne Weston.

Carruthers, Tex noted, was listening with what was certainly a good imitation of interest if it was not the real thing. Mr. Weston went around the house after his car.

When Tex came out the two flyers took their leave, promising to call on the morrow. Their young chauffeur followed Mr. Weston's roadster to town, insisting on keeping so close that the dust came back on them in a cloud until Tex remarked,

"I'm aiming to drive over this road again tomorrow so I can take in some o' the scenery. Most of its flying through the air right now."

"Ah, quit yer kiddin'," grinned the driver, and slowed up a trifle.

"Isn't much to see, at that," observed Tex.

They were still in the outskirts of town, and almost every habitation was of the shack variety. Round-eyed, dirty Mexican children watched them pass. The Mexicans' dwellings appeared to be located without any particular reason—few of them faced the road, and most of them were set in the middle of fields.

"Mr. Weston is about as restful as a bomb explosion," said Tex to Carruthers in low tones. "I wonder is there something the matter with him or is that his natural state?"

"Search me, but he's as bad as a waltzing mouse. Seems to be nice, though."

"He's got a little peach of a daughter to his credit, any way. Hello, here's the village."

THEY turned down the main highway, which was now bordered with fairly neat-appearing houses on the whole, although there were many in a more or less ramshackle condition. They were set wide apart, and through the intervals between them many of the unpainted little cabins of Mexicans could be seen in the distance. The town appeared to consist of a little nucleus of white people, surrounded by Mexicans who lived around the big, fenced fields that stretched away for some miles.

The highway, stretching north and south, ran within a few hundred yards of the Gulf and parallel to the shore. About half-way down the village a road branched eastward, running to the edge of the Gulf of Mexico. Bordering this short street were the business houses, mostly one-story affairs with false fronts.

It appeared that every male citizen of the town must be lounging on that street, from the number of men who curiously watched them draw up to a big, square, two-story building with a road on either side that bore the sign:

JAMES WESTON
GENERAL MERCHANDISE
MONEY LOANED ON CROPS
Post Office: AUSMAN, TEXAS

"Mr. Weston wanted Carruthers and me to stop here a moment," Tex told Correli. "Is the hotel far from here?"

"No, right on down the street here. It's on the right hand side, bang up against the water. There's a sign on it; you can't miss it. Suppose I take the grips down?"

"Good. And thanks, sonny, for the ride."

"Welcome," mumbled the boy, looking with carefully hidden admiration at the two flyers. Then the youth expectorated with much gusto and started with a jump for the hotel.

Mr. Weston was waiting on the porch of the store, chatting with some of the flannel-shirted, sombreroed men who were loafing there in various postures, all restful. Apparently they had all heard of Corinne Weston's airplane ride, for Tex and Carruthers got a complete and leisurely inspection as they mounted the steps. The store was set back somewhat from the street, and was surrounded by a porch which was roofed only in the front. On the sides it served for a platform on which goods could be loaded.

"Come in, come in," said the owner, and led the way with his long, jerky stride.

The interior was very large, with four different rows of counters running three-quarters of the distance back. A partition ran across the whole width of the store, one door leading into a small office and the other into what was apparently a store-room. Three or four youths, one of them a Mexican, were waiting on some customers. Every conceivable branch of merchandise was represented—crockery, clothing, groceries, gaudy house furnishings, and the like. It was a huge place, given the appearance of being crowded by the low ceiling. From his experience with general stores in Texas

MacDowell imagined that upstairs were stored agricultural implements, grain, and other bulky commodities.

They followed Mr. Weston back into the office. A huge safe was the most prominent part of its furnishings. An old-fashioned desk and armchair, an antiquated filing-cabinet and two straight chairs completed the equipment. A window and a door opened into the back yard.

"Sit down, sit down," said their host, who seemed to have a habit of repeating himself when he talked.

He jerked off his Panama, hung it on a nail, seated himself and began tapping on his desk with his fingers. His sunken, over-bright eyes darted here and there, and he chewed his cigar rapidly.

"Lieutenant Carruthers, would you mind if I had a word with Lieutenant MacDowell in private?" he asked suddenly.

"Certainly not," replied the flyer, and got to his feet. "I'll——"

"Just a minute, please," Tex interrupted. "Mr. Weston, if I'm wrong correct me, but I have an idea that what you are going to say relates somewhat, perhaps, to certain peculiar things connected with me. If so, I would like to have Carruthers present."

"Oh, certainly, certainly. You are right, quite right. But—er—I was asking more for my own sake than yours, lieutenant."

He leaped to his feet and paced the floor rapidly, pulling nervously at his Vandyke.

"Oh, well, in that case——"

"Never mind, never mind," interrupted the storekeeper with uplifted hand. "Doesn't make much difference."

He closed the door with a bang and then leaned close to the two flyers. His eyes, a hunted, furtive light in them, burned into MacDowell's.

"I shouldn't say this—shouldn't say it. It would be most horrible if a living soul aside you two ever know that I have said it. But I must—I must. Lieutenant MacDowell, get away from Ausman. Get away right away. Believe me, you must."

"May I ask why?" drawled Tex, lounging easily in his chair, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on Mr. Weston.

"No. I can't tell you. It's a friendly warning."

Once again he started that nervous pacing, his face working. Apparently he was under some terrific strain, for he was completely unstrung.

Tex climbed to his feet slowly.

"Thank you, Mr. Weston," he said slowly, his eyes never leaving the merchant's face. "I think I am getting a glimmer of what you mean. If I'm right——"

"No, no, I can't tell you! You mustn't ask me, indeed you mustn't! You don't know what I am risking in even——"

"Don't worry, Mr. Weston," Tex cut in, his voice more gentle than usual, as was always the case when he felt that a contest of any kind was looming before him. "Whatever I think I know is mostly the result of what has happened before I came here, and it only needed an inkling of some kind for me to jump to conclusions. I'm on my guard, and nobody's going to know what woke me up, in case anything happens. Any acquaintance between us is the result of whatever we were able to do for Miss Corinne. Good afternoon, and thanks."

Carruthers was agog with curiosity and pleasant excitement. Little as he knew of the circumstances surrounding MacDowell's arrest for carrying opium and his previous escapes from unpleasant entanglements along the border, he felt in the cryptic conversation he had just listened to an undercurrent of meaning which seemed to indicate that wider forces were at work than were compassed in the straggling little town of Ausman. Nevertheless, he did not ask any questions, but walked down the sun-scorched street as silently as Tex himself.

They were opposite the open doors of what appeared to be a large soft-drink place, fitted up exactly like a saloon, and Tex glanced in. A number of men were standing along the bar, and two or three of them looked out at the flyers. One man turned his head back quickly. In the dim shadow of the place his face was but vaguely defined, but as they walked on Tex strove to place what had appeared like a familiar face.

"Now where in ——" he said aloud, slapping his thigh with the helmet he carried in his hands, his thoughtful gaze on the sidewalk.

He did not finish what he had started to say so Carruthers inquired,

"Where in —— what?"

"By the mighty, Beers!"

"You sure have been talking Fiji the last few minutes," complained Carruthers. "There are no beers nowadays, Tex. It's hot enough——"

"Jack, we've fallen into something!" stated

Tex, his gray eyes alight with a leaping, dancing flame that gave the lie to his outward air of lounging ease.

"What the deal, Tex?"

"Listen, Jack. It's bound up, I believe, with the things that have been happening to me for some months past. The last shot was the opium deal at Donovan. What Mr. Weston hinted at has almost been labeled by the man I just saw in that place down the street. Unless I'm badly mistaken, I'm due for another session with my friend Dave Fitzpatrick, although just what the lay is I don't know. If you don't mind I'm going to shoot off my face a little to you and Correll, because if Fitzpatrick tries to work on me here you two are liable to be roped in on it, just the way George Hickman is in the soup with me right now. I'm going to give you all the dope I've got, and you can use your own judgment. Heaven knows I don't want you two caught in the net."

"Tex, I'd give my little finger for a good scrap with that old geezer. I don't know why on earth you should be afraid of him here, though. This is a long way from his hangout, isn't it? But if you really have got some reason for thinking he's got influence here, why not beat it, old man, and avoid getting into further trouble? Good ——, man——"

"That's not it, Jack. Boy, I'm sure watching my step. But I'm figuring that maybe, by hook or crook, if I could get next to the deal down here I might just hop on to something that would help clear up this —— mess they've got me in right now on this opium. But let's rope in the sergeant and collect all the cards so you'll each have a good look at the deck before you decide to horn in on the game. I hope you won't."

They had been standing on the walk in front of the large white house which bore the faded sign, "Ausman House" as its only mark of being a hotel. It faced the street, the waters of the Gulf only a hundred feet from one side of it. A steep bank fell off sheer from the level of the town to the water, fifty feet below.

They had just started up the walk when the burly figure of Sergeant Correll emerged from the doorway.

"I've got your rooms," yelled Correll. "Your suitcases are up there now."

"Thanks. Come here a minute, will you, sergeant?"

CORRELL joined them and they walked slowly to the edge of the bank, where they stretched themselves on the grass. As briefly as possible Tex sketched his experiences with the uncrowned king of the border. He told them how his father had been the means of Fitzpatrick's disgrace and exile years before, and how Fitzpatrick had tried to use his immense influence and power to revenge himself on MacDowell, senior, by entangling Tex himself in some criminal thing that would result in his being disgraced and his life ruined.

"The point is this," Tex told them, puffing slowly on a cigaret as he gazed across the waters of the Gulf into the mist that veiled the water several miles out. "I just saw one of the men that was in that crooked poker game in El Paso, when Fitzpatrick's men tried to get me a couple of thousand dollars in debt so that he would have a hold on me. Hitch that up with Mr. Weston's warning, and I have a hunch that the answer is that for some reason or other Fitzpatrick has a hold on this town. Seems far-fetched, but I'm —— if I don't believe it!"

Correll had been following MacDowell's narrative closely, nodding agreement from time to time. He spoke now for the first time since Tex had started talking.

"Lieutenant, I was a cavalryman for twenty years before I joined the first aero squadron the army ever had," he stated, "and about twelve of them years I spent along the border. You can't tell me nothin' about Dave Fitzpatrick that I won't believe—if it's bad. It ain't impossible at all that he's got a finger in this Ausman pie. He runs ninety per cent. of the crooked work from San Diego to Brownsville—I know that for a fact. Just what he could use this town for——"

"We may be able to figure that out," said Tex. "Now, here's the meat on the end of the stick. He's got me roped now on this opium deal—the newspapers have seen to it that I became known as an opium-carrier, and I'm in a —— of a mess right now. But, if Beers is here as Fitzpatrick's man, and if Fitzpatrick runs the powers that be in this town like he does a lot of border towns, I'll be mightily mistaken if he don't try to make assurance doubly sure by roping me tighter while he's got me here. Another scandal for one Loot MacDowell would just about finish the beans, wouldn't it?"

"Sure would," agreed Carruthers.

Correll nodded slowly.

"Well, enough of that. I just wanted to warn you fellows to watch your step, and don't get mixed in with any trouble that may come along. I——"

"What are you plannin' to do, yourself, if you don't mind me askin'?" asked the grizzled old sergeant, his keen eyes fixed on the cleancut features of the Texan.

"I'm planning to watch my step, just like I advised you, but I'm going to keep a weather eye out for picking up anything that may put a crimp into not only any game that may be started here, but maybe—just maybe, mind you—I might get hold of something that would help clear me on this opium scrape."

Tex didn't know it, but in the expression of that determination to stand by his job at Ausman despite the possibility of another run-in with the tremendously powerful and unscrupulous enemy who had already placed him with his back to the wall, he clinched the feeling of respect and admiration that had already begun to develop in the mind of hard-boiled old Sergeant Correll. And the sergeant was an ally not to be despised.

"I'm satisfied to stack in with you if there's trouble, lieutenant," he said.

"You know me, Tex," put in Carruthers.

"Thanks. I suspect we may be making a mountain out of a molehill—somehow or other it doesn't seem possible that old Fitzpatrick would have his claws in very deep way up here. I almost hope he has, and that he shows his hand. Dad is busy, as I told you, but it's going to be a —— long pull before he finds out anything that will clear me of having a few hundred dollars' worth of opium in my ship. It might just be possible that I could get hold of somebody here who would know the rights of that deal and I could choke the truth out of him."

"I sure hope so, lieutenant," said Correll, meditatively chewing a blade of grass as he talked, "but as near as I can figure there isn't any one man that knows a quarter of what Fitzpatrick is up to. He's got most of the admitted bad-men and a lot of camouflaged crooks in white collars working for him up and down the border, but each of 'em knows only his section of some particular smuggling deal or whatever it is."

"Most of the white-collar boys are men Fitzpatrick has framed, aren't they?" inquired Carruthers.

"Yes, sir. I only know one that I could put my finger on—he was a Customs man that lost a bunch of dough over to Juarez one night and fell for a bribe the next day. He got caught, but was so —— scared o' Fitzpatrick that he wouldn't tell a thing. It's like all the rest of the rustlers, smugglers and half the killers they've got through the Big Bend—not a —— one of 'em will talk when they get caught. Fitzpatrick sure has 'em buffaloed."

"Well, let's go and wash up," said Tex, coming slowly to his feet. "How are the meals at yon palatial hostelry?"

"Pretty good. And say, lieutenant, the more I think of this town the more I think maybe we ain't far off in keeping a weather eye on our old friend Fitz. I told you it was a funny town, and I'm getting a Nick Carter theory in my head that may be shootin' near the mark!"

The sergeant was undoubtedly serious in what he said, and he met MacDowell's quizzical gaze without smiling.

"What's your idea?" inquired the Texan as they strolled around the house—it was more of a house than a hotel—to the front door.

"I'm just going to let you have a look at the town for a night before I tell you—then it won't sound so foolish," grinned Correll.

VIII

THE "Bogie Bill" show was a Texas institution. Where Bill Drumm got the name Bogie tacked on to his cognomen nobody seemed to know, but as Bogie Bill's show his outfit had played through the small towns of the Southwest for years. All the old-timers were familiar with it, and in countless small towns his coming was looked forward to as one of the leading events of the year, rivaling in importance a county-seat barbecue, baseball championship game and band concert combined.

He ran an old-time Wild West show, pure and simple. The show carried a string of twenty or more horses, mostly either natural or trained buckers, and he always managed to have at least a couple of outlaws that were really tough medicine for the best of riders. He carried eight or ten riders and ropers, the number varying greatly according to the personal idiosyncrasies of the performers, who were all cowhands who wanted to try something new. Drumm's daughter Maisie was heavily billed as the world's champion woman rider, roper and shot, and to an unprejudiced eye the claim was not greatly exaggerated, although as far as anybody knew, Maisie had no official right to the title.

A small carnival which included a great variety of side-shows, always traveled along with the show, and owing to the wide acquaintance of Bogie Bill his show usually took on the aspect of a town fair. The Forty-nine Girls, Fatima, the Fat Woman and a few midgets had been institutions with the show ever since it started. It might be added that a number of too skillful card players and other light-fingered gentry had traveled along with Drumm for so many years that every one in Texas should have known them, and in fact a lot of people did. Nevertheless, when the show was in town it appeared as if "everything went," in good old Western style.

Some few days before the arrival of Tex MacDowell in Ausman the show pitched its tents in South San Antonio, less than a mile from the eastern entrance of Donovan Field and about three miles from the center of the city. It had been a long time since Drumm had essayed a big town, and apparently the chance was a good one, for at eight o'clock every seat was full and the sidewalls had been rolled up to allow standees to peek through the aisle-spaces at a quarter each.

The carnival side-shows were doing a rushing business, and the hoarse cries of the barkers split the air with raucous sound that almost drowned the wheezes and groans of a couple of hurdy-gurdies. Flaring gasoline torches illumined the grounds fitfully.

The show was in three sections. The first section consisted of fancy riding of all descriptions, done by Bogie's staff of riders and climaxed by the work of his daughter Maisie. Then there was roping and fancy shooting, and finally the big feature of the show—the riding of bucking ponies. The grand finale was an attempt by every rider in the outfit to stick on the two outlaws, and a standing reward of fifty dollars in gold to any one in the audience who could stay on "Sunfish," a mangy, bony old war-horse who was named for his polished and unusual ability at performing that well-known maneuver.

The first section was well under way, and Bogie Bill, a squat, jovial, red-faced old veteran of the West, was rubbing his hands gleefully at the interest the show had aroused in San Antonio. He saw a solid week of good business at the one stand, if his luck held and he got a good weather break.

It was "Blackie" Stearns' turn to show, and for some reason he did not appear on the little black pony. As the wait became longer Drumm's face grew dark. Stearns had caused him trouble before—he wondered whether he had got hold of liquor again.

He was starting back for the horse tent when finally the flaps separating the canvas corral and the main tent opened and Stearns appeared on Black Bess. He was extremely tall, long legged and broad shouldered, the appearance of his rather handsome face spoiled by a deep frown that seemed to be everpresent. Drumm noted with rising wrath that there was a flush on his rider's face tonight that bespoke indulgence in John Barleycorn.

As he entered the riding tent Stearns roweled his little black horse viciously. The mare, taken by surprize, bucked so suddenly that the tall rider was nearly unseated. Stearns was a good rider—better than most of the staff Drumm carried with the show—but the unlooked-for pitch of the horse, plus the overload of liquor that he carried, made him look suspiciously like a tyro.

"Haw, haw, haw!" came loudly from a stout, loud-voiced man on the front row.

The ungovernable temper that had kept Jim Stearns almost an outcast for five years flamed up in instant response to the contemptuous laugh, which had started a series of snickers. His wrath plus his drinking made him totally unmindful of anything but getting at the one who had given vent to that amused, scornful laugh. Like a flash he was off his horse and had started for the loud-voiced spectator.

When Drumm and three of the riders arrived on the scene Stearns was being held by four men, still fighting wildly. His face was convulsed with the wild lust to get at his man.

"Get out of here, you —— —— fool!" snarled Drumm, and with the aid of his riders he yanked and pushed the still-fighting Stearns back into the horse tent.

"Get out there and ride!" roared the incensed owner to Pete Driggs, who was next in order. "As for you, come to the office and get your time!"

Stearns followed the bulky boss out of the tent and into a small one which served as office and living-quarters for Drumm.

Bogie Bill turned on the sullen Stearns with glittering eyes.

"You'll spoil my show, will you, you blankety blank, booze-guzzling, chicken-livered——"

He never got any further. Stearns pulled the Colt which all the riders wore for "atmosphere" when showing and which was loaded for the shooting exhibition.

The crack of the shot seemed to reverberate with hideous sound in the tent as Drumm fell, wondering disbelief in his eyes. He was dead before he struck the ground.

All the insane passion left Stearns as his erstwhile employer struck the wooden flooring of the tent. Ever since he could remember the sullen rider's life had been a series of escapades, ranging from negligible scrapes to almost life-and-death imbroglios, but this was the climax of them all. The die was cast.

HE WAS perfectly cool and alert, suddenly, as he crowded the body beneath the low cot and draped the blanket down to hide it. He quickly replaced the spent shot in the magazine clip, listening closely the while. Apparently the shot had gone unnoticed in all the turmoil of cheering spectators in the show proper plus the manifold noises of the carnival. Drumm's tent was on the opposite side of the show tent from that used by the carnival, and unless some one in the horse tent had heard it his chances of a few hours respite were good. Drumm was often hard to find while the show was going on, and his absence would arouse no suspicion.

Encouraged by the fact that no one had appeared, Stearns took time to hide the body underneath a pile of saddles and blankets that were lying in one corner of the tent. First he pulled out a well-filled pocketbook from the dead man's pocket. Then he stole out, skirting the carnival at a safe distance, and headed for the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, which ran past Donovan Field less than a mile away.

From moment to moment he stopped to listen, but there were no signs of pursuit. With luck it might be that he could reach the border. The more he thought of it the more he was encouraged to hope that it would be morning before the body was found. He had hidden it well beneath the high-piled saddles and blankets.

Blackie Stearns possessed no idea of right and wrong—his creed had always been to get away with as much as was safely possible. He was as cool and nerveless as if nothing had happened as he lay beneath the shelter of some bushes along the railroad track. The black, ungovernable rage that possessed him at times had at last been his undoing—and in some ways he was glad.

For years he had drifted from job to job, from fight to fight, because sooner or later he alienated every one around him, wherever he was. He was hard, bitter, unrepentant. If he should be able to get across the Rio Grande he would not greatly regret the shooting of Bogie Bill.

Stearns knew the border, and he knew what he would do when he got there. So he lay quietly and strained his eyes toward San Antonio, looking for a headlight to loom up northward.

Fortune favored him. A freight, slowing for the Donovan Field crossing, passed his hiding-place slowly enough for him to risk boarding it. Running with the train, he managed to catch a ladder and swing aboard. The freight picked up speed and set out on the trip to Laredo.

IX

TWO men were sitting on the small veranda of a big, two-story structure a hundred yards south of the Rio Grande. The same two men had sat there, at intervals, many times before, and should one who had been present at their last interview, nearly two months before, come upon them this particular night it would have seemed as if they had not moved. The squat, powerfully built one, sat in a big, crude armchair. The smaller man was squatting on his heels against the wall.

The veranda was at the rear of the big building, which was the general store of Dave Fitzpatrick. Tia Nita, Mexico, the collection of unpainted board buildings that surrounded the store, was owned, lock, stock and barrel by the massive, gray-haired man in the chair.

It was late in the afternoon, and the sun was sinking in crimson glory. In a few moments the semi-tropic twilight would descend with what would be startling swiftness farther north.

"You arrived at the right time, Searles," Fitzpatrick was saying, his light eyes gazing steadily at the fringe of scrubby growth that outlined the banks of the river.

His mouth, which seemed like a wide, almost lipless slit in his square face, scarcely moved as he spoke. His face was without tan or wrinkle, the skin stretched so tightly across the bony framework that it seemed as if a hollow or a wrinkle in it would be impossible.

Searles showed the effects of many years along the border. His lined face was brown and leathery, the eyes in a perpetual squint. His sandy hair was thin and almost colorless. He was clasping his knees with big gnarled hands that were like old mahogany in their coloring. He did not answer Fitzpatrick, but as was his custom remained silent until words were absolutely necessary.

Fitzpatrick apparently did not expect any answer. He seemed to be thinking deeply as he gazed with unwinking steadiness straight ahead of him. Finally he went on,

"I heard from Beers, up at Ausman, today. Young MacDowell is there—flew in and will be there a few days. Got in yesterday."

His voice was level and expressionless. Not a hint of shading varied his words. There was a curious impression of cold, passionless power about the man, whose whole body seemed to be as motionless as though made of stone. Not even a finger moved.

Searles, who was small, middle aged, utterly neutral-looking, still maintained his silence. He took out the makings, rolled himself a cigaret and lit it.

"The last time you were here I gave you my reasons for crushing young MacDowell—for doing to his father what he did to me twenty years ago. I broke my rule, in telling you, for the first time in my life. 'Weasel' Williams failed. Although MacDowell seems to be hooked right now, his being in Ausman is too good an opportunity to clinch matters. Remember what I told you—that when I finally see him ruined, I leave the border country. I have waited a long time for my opportunity. You yourself will go to Ausman to handle the thing. You know what I have never told any other living man, and therefore you will know better than to fall down."

Without varying his voice in any way, without even the suspicion of loudness or emphasis, Fitzpatrick's words conveyed a depth of cold, bitter, venomous resolution that no one—least of all Searles—could mistake.

Searles expelled a cloud of smoke from his lungs before he replied. His words seemed to be irrelevant.

"What are you going to do about Weasel—leave him in jail?" he asked.

Searles had been serving Fitzpatrick well for ten years, and of all the countless men who obeyed their chief, from ignorant Mexicans to men of supposed wealth and standing, he was closest to him. The greatest of the Mexican bandits with whom Fitzpatrick carried on his traffic in many things—information as well as merchandise—would have thought many times before asking him a question as to his plans about anything save the matter immediately in hand.

Fitzpatrick replied briefly, after a long pause.

"Weasel failed to get away with stealing that carburetor MacDowell and Cary invented, didn't he? He's off the list. His case might be a warning to you, Searles."

The imperturbable Searles took another drag at his cigaret, his calm untroubled.

"Then you don't think that the planted opium and all the stir that's being made over it is enough to fix on this here MacDowell?" he asked, rocking gently on his heels.

"Probably it is. I understand that Bill MacDowell was down to San Antone and that he is stirring up a lot of action along the border. He was at the bottom of that pick-up near Del Rio the other night, I imagine. He's a big man in Texas, but he doesn't know that Manuel Veriga is in Mexico City."

"So Manny planted the stuff in the ship, did he?"

"Yes, and saved his hide by getting away with it, too. Snow, in San Antone, was primed to pick it up."

The conversation was so utterly quiet and unemotional that it would have worn on the nerves of almost any one but the two men themselves. The torpid Fitzpatrick seemed to have a quality of resistless power about him, although it would be puzzling to try to analyze any particular source of the impression. His smooth, square face, which seemed in the half-light to have a gray tinge that harmonized with the grizzled hair and gray flannel shirt, was more like a mask than a human countenance—the long, narrow eyes mirrored none of the thoughts or emotions within. Searles was as he had been for many years—not even Fitzpatrick had ever succeeded in making him give any indication of either fear or enthusiasm.

It was significant of Fitzpatrick that Searles should ask that question as to the identity of the man who had succeeded in planting the contraband stuff in MacDowell's ship. Searles knew more about the extent of his chief's operations than any other four men, and yet he was constantly learning more and more of how really far-reaching the strings were that centered in Tia Nita.

"With Manuel in Mexico City I reckon MacDowell is hooked. Near as I can figure it's going to take a confession to get the youngster out o' that, ain't it?"

"Yes. I'm keeping the pot boiling in San Antonio. If necessary, Sallman can start digging away at the War Department in Washington. But it will be quicker action to rope and hog-tie MacDowell for good in Ausman."

Searles remembered with the ghost of a smile how he had been shaken to his spurs, as he expressed it, when he had first heard Fitzpatrick carelessly mention the name of Sallman, who was somewhat of a power in the national administration. More than any other single thing in all his years as an underling of the man sitting beside him, that name had shown him what kind of an organization Fitzpatrick had under him.

He had known of Chinamen, bandit chiefs, gunmen, judges, bankers and at least one mayor of a sizeable town who were eating out of the hand of the man who was ostensibly the keeper of a general store; he knew of one revolution in Mexico largely promoted by that same merchant; but somehow the knowledge that one of his underlings was serving in a position of trust and power in the nation's capitol was more impressive than all of Fitzpatrick's other human and official machinery combined.

He did not ask for any details regarding the projected trip to Ausman, but smoked tranquilly and waited. The velvet dusk was commencing to soften the outlines of the mesquite and veil the ugliness of the rough buildings, and the vanguard of the stars shone palely, widely scattered across the darkening sky.

Fitzpatrick was silent, likewise. Only the low hiss of the Rio Grande and the noises of stirring night things marred the stillness, when a low knock came to their ears from within the store. Fitzpatrick's living-quarters opened off the veranda on which they were sitting.

"What is it?"

The level voice was no louder than when he had been talking to Searles, but the answer came promptly, in liquid Spanish.

"A man who wishes to see you, *señor*."

"Who is it?"

"He will not say, *señor*. José and I stopped him. He was riding from Nueva Laredo to see the *señor*, he said. He is young and tall."

"Light the lamp and bring him around here."

"*Si, señor.*"

In a moment the soft light of a big, white-shaded lamp glowed through the open door. Searles seemed to sink into deeper shadow against the wall. Fitzpatrick, as if carved from stone, was likewise in shadow. Not even a hand had moved since the start of his conversation with Searles.

In a moment a young Mexican appeared around the corner of the building, guiding Blackie Stearns. The Mexican stopped a few feet from the veranda and indicated it to Stearns with a wave of his hand. Then he took up his station by the corner, out of earshot. Two guns sagged from his belt.

Stearns walked slowly up to the porch, striving to pierce the gloom that half-veiled the two men.

"Dave Fitzpatrick?" he inquired, a touch of bravado in his words.

As he stood in the light streaming from the doorway the marks of his journey showed plainly on his rather gaudy costume—red bandanna, blue flannel shirt and much filigreed boots. He was dressed as he had been for the show. His face was haggard and dirty, but the broad shoulders were held well back and his tall figure was straight.

There was an appreciable interval before Fitzpatrick spoke.

"Well?" he said finally.

"I'm here after a job," stated Stearns, his hard, bold eyes on Fitzpatrick.

The rider got a curious impression that the light eyes of the man before him would shine like a cat's at night—they seemed to be more obvious than any other detail of Fitzpatrick's appearance in the deepening twilight.

"Well?" said Fitzpatrick again.

The icy inscrutability of the man to whom he was talking began to affect Stearns with much the same sort of half-hypnotism that a snake exercises. Stearns knew his border, through hard experience, and the knowledge of who Fitzpatrick was plus the influence of his physical nearness sent the rider into a species of half-fearful nervousness. His next words were like the slightly hysterical bravado of a man who is defying he knows not what.

"If you can't use me, I'll blow, but I'd like to know!"

Fitzpatrick refused to be hurried. There was another interval, during which the murderer of Bogie Bill stirred restlessly despite himself.

"How long has it been since you had anything to eat?" asked Fitzpatrick suddenly, his words as flat and emotionless as ever.

"This morning," returned Stearns, glancing surprizedly from Searles to his chief and back again.

"Tell José to fix you up and bring you back in half an hour."

Stearns started to speak, and then checked himself with an effort. He turned without a word and strode off toward the Mexican, who was still lounging against the corner of the store, his cigaret glowing dully.

"Searles, did you notice that man?"

"How?"

"Remind you of anybody?"

"Not especially."

"Do you think that in the dark, with a uniform and a mask, he might make it hard for anybody who hadn't seen him close to swear that it was *not* MacDowell? Say in Ausman?"

Searles considered the matter leisurely. The two men were built alike—tall, rangy, broad-shouldered. Their faces, while there was no resemblance, were of the same cast, although Stearns' was sullen and scowling. The little Texan finally nodded.

"I reckon maybe—in Ausman," he stated.

For the next half-hour Fitzpatrick did what he would do, perhaps, with no other man than Searles and for no other enterprise than the one which meant the satisfying of a twenty-year lust for vengeance—talked over his plans with another man. As quietly and casually as if little depended on it, although with a subtle undercurrent that was deadly in its resolution, Fitzpatrick talked and Searles mostly listened, his lined face showing no slightest indication that he realized what the project might mean to him.

When Stearns returned and José had taken up his former position at the corner Fitzpatrick said—

"Stearns, I can—"

The tall rider jumped as if he had been shot.

"—use you for a while. If you succeed it will be worth your while—and it won't be as dangerous as shooting Bogie Bill Drumm. If you fail——"

The cold voice ceased, but Stearns scarcely noticed. His mind was in a whirl at the realization that already Fitzpatrick knew who he was. He was hooked more tightly at the start than he had expected. Suddenly the massive, sphinx-like bulk looming vaguely from the huge arm chair took on an additional sinister power to the nerve-shaken criminal. He felt helpless and could not explain exactly why.

"You will go to Ausman, Texas, with Searles here, and be under his orders. You have nothing to fear from the shooting in San Antonio—providing you do what you are told. You will be instructed there as to what you're expected to do."

For just a moment Fitzpatrick's eyes darted rapidly to the squatting figure of Searles, and then back to the sullen young rider before him.

"A day or two after you arrive in Ausman—by boat—I will be there to instruct you myself," he said.

For once, at least, Searles was completely and obviously astonished.

X

SERGEANT CORRELL and the two flyers got to work bright and early the day following the arrival of the loaded ship in Ausman. The reconstruction of a wrecked ship in the field is always a long and tedious job, particularly so in this case, because the ship had been upside down in the mud for many hours.

Correll had put all his time on the motor as soon as he had succeeded in getting the ship right side up again. The more obvious damage to the eight cylinder engine had been rectified, but there remained the job of checking up the delicate timing by which magnetos, camshafts, crankshaft and other things work in delicate synchronization. There was rust and dirt to wipe from contact points and distributor plugs, and sixteen spark-plugs to remove and inspect. All day the three airmen, occasionally compelled to wait for a tool from their scanty kit, fussed over the all-important motor.

It was a rather silent day, on the whole, until late afternoon. Tex was thinking of his predicament, and still more of the possible opportunity of locking horns with his Nemesis again in Ausman. The evening before the three army men had set out to see the town, and it bore out the comments of both Correll and the good Samaritan in Barnes City. There was little really tangible evidence, Tex reflected, and yet there was an indefinable atmosphere that set the little village apart in his experience.

True, there were many men who showed the effects of liquor—more than usual in a town so far from the border, but nothing unusual for a man accustomed to towns lying close to the Rio Grande. Balavo, the Mexican of the automobile wreck, owned a place which was rather curious, from the impression one gained from the wide-open doors, and borne out by Sergeant Correll, who had visited it.

Apparently it was a real old-fashioned saloon, dance-hall and gambling-place. Tex had yearned to go inside and look beyond the swinging-doors in the back of the saloon itself; three weeks before he would have, but now the reckless young pilot was not courting useless complications for the mere joy of the struggle—any chance he might take would be a carefully calculated one in Ausman.

It was apparent to a casual observer that the law, represented almost solely by one Vancouver B. Dale, extended potent protection to open lawbreaking so far as the serving of the cup that cheers went. But there were other things which seemed to hint aggravatingly at more extensive and subtle differences in the town. There was the complete lack of negroes and the overwhelming percentage of Mexicans, for instance.

Then the fact that for all practical purposes Mr. James Weston had the only store of any consequence in the town, aside from a restaurant, a candy and ice-cream place, and a few other minor businesses. And there was Sergeant Correll's word that not one in ten of the white men appeared to have a thing in the world to do.

Correll was not habitually talkative, especially in the presence of his superiors. Tex was engrossed in his own thoughts and Carruthers in his as they worked busily. Carruthers, if the truth were to be told, was devoting considerable mental attention to Corinne Weston. Unconsciously the few conversations he started reflected his thoughts, and the ever-observant Tex grinned to himself.

Late in the afternoon, just as they were preparing to knock off work for the day, Tex gave utterance for the first time to his thoughts regarding the possible complications that might arise from his presence in Ausman.

"I've been trying to figure this town all day and I'll be —— if I'm not stumped!" he observed, wrenching a spark-plug home with a last turn at the plug-wrench.

He was perched on top of the motor, his long legs dangling.

Correll, who was tracking the propeller by means of a box and a hub wrench, stopped work for a moment and wiped the perspiration from his red, fleshy face.

"Lieutenant, some time or other I'm going to spring my theory on you, when I get the nerve. It don't sound reasonable——"

"Oh, I've got more than half an idea that Fitzpatrick's got his claws in here, but it sounds so —— foolish," returned Tex, laying aside his wrench for a moment. "What in the world Beers would be doing here I don't know, but on the other hand what would Fitzpatrick be doing nosing around this town?"

Correll sat on the box by means of which he had been measuring the track of the propeller as it swung, and lit a big black pipe.

"There's something funny about the law in this town, ain't there?" he inquired oratorically.

"Right," admitted Carruthers, coming out of his trance.

"And there's too many Mexicans and too few darkies, ain't there?"

"Well, it's unusual anyway," said Tex, watching the burly sergeant with a whimsical expression.

He knew that old Correll was getting at

something, but it was amusing to see him trying to persuade himself with laborious logic that he was not talking Wild West fiction.

"Did you ever take a look at Fitzpatrick's hangout, Tia Nita, or hear about it?" was the old cavalry sergeant's next query.

"No, except that it was just a little Mexican town like a dozen other hamlets along the border."

"Well, the truth of the matter is that Fitzpatrick owns hundreds—yes, by cripes, thousands—of acres of land—just about the whole —— country around Tia Nita. He lets it out to the Mexicans on shares or something, makes 'em do all their trading at that store of his, and has 'em in the hollow of his hand. They don't dare blow their noses—or wouldn't if a spig ever blew his nose—without askin' him. He's like a king with 'em. Get the idea?"

"That all these Mex people around here are on the same basis?"

"They do all the cultivatin' of the land, don't they?"

Carruthers, who had long since finished cleaning out the oil tank with gasoline and was now smoking restfully as he sat on one wheel, slapped his thigh enthusiastically.

"By Jupiter, Tex, I believe Correll is right!"

Tex looked at Correll with quizzical admiration. Vague ideas of a similar nature had been running through his own head ever since the warning of Mr. Weston had been backed by the sight of Beers—or the man he thought was Beers. He was glad that some one else had the same idea, and he enjoyed listening to the almost painfully serious sergeant work his theories out. He had not suspected that old Correll was as keen as his words were showing him to be.

"What would you say about—Mr. Weston? He seems to be the big gun here," inquired Tex, rolling a cigaret deftly.

"That's kind of got me stopped, unless——"

He stopped in embarrassment. He didn't know just what degree of friendship existed between the flyers and the Westons. Tex grinned down at Carruthers from his lofty perch.

"As long as our remarks are confined to *Mr.* Weston, why, let's speak freely," he said.

"It may seem queer to you, lieutenant, but I've known of one man—and heard of a lot more—that was roped and hog-tied by Fitzpatrick—that would stack up bigger than Weston, by a long row of beans," declared Correll.

"Well, time will tell," said Tex, vaulting to the ground. "Let's pick up and get gone from here."

"I think we ought to drop in and see how Miss Weston is coming," said Carruthers as the three men started collecting the tools and inserting them in their proper niches in the tool-kit.

"I don't know—might cause a relapse if she had too much excitement," replied Tex with a wink at the sergeant.

Carruthers laughed good-naturedly.

"It's the proper thing to do and you know it," he stated. "Besides, you may pick up some dope from her father if he's around. Your guard is going and refuses to let his prisoner out of his sight."

"I have no choice, then. Is our private jitney going to be here this afternoon, Correll?"

"Yes, sir. Four o'clock. You couldn't pry that kid loose from us with a crowbar. He thinks a flyer is the next thing to the twelve apostles."

They finished wrapping the tools, and then covered up with canvas covers motor, propeller and rear cockpit, which were exposed to the weather. This finished, they reclined in the shade of a wing to await the coming of their car.

"Returning to the main topic, what do you two Sherlocks figure Fitzpatrick would have his hand in here for?" asked Carruthers.

"Well, I don't know. I've got a good theory, but according to the best detective fiction it is very easy to twist facts to fit theories. But concentrate your massive intellect on a few queries. Now——"

"I doubt whether I can comprehend your questions through the word barrage you're putting out, but go ahead."

"From what you've heard of Fitzpatrick, what is his main source of income?"

"Why, smuggling dope and liquor from Mexico, and guns and things back over, I guess."

"That's a good guess," put in Correll.

"Very. Ausman is right on the Gulf, isn't it? And some of those launches and things could be used to transport contraband goods from a small steamer to land, couldn't they?"

Correll slapped his thigh enthusiastically as he burst forth:

"What I've been thinkin' to a T, lieutenant! And all these cars around here, which I can't see the reason for, could be used mighty well carryin' drugs up to San Antone, Corpus Christi, Houston, and so forth, couldn't they? And there's three or four trucks in town, too. It would be a mint!"

Beneath the surface facetiousness of MacDowell's manner there had been a subtle undercurrent that was profoundly serious. The full possibilities of a small, isolated town such as Ausman, controlled entirely for all practical purposes by Fitzpatrick, located on the Gulf, had been growing in his mind ever since the definite suspicion that his enemy had a foothold. Evidence from Correll and Carruthers that his carefully built-up theories were not too fantastic gave his suspicions additional strength.

"Just look what it would mean," he told them, as his eyes rested on a cloud of dust that was rising from the rough country road half a mile away. "If Fitzpatrick had a small boat of some kind that could make the trip from some small Mexican port, he could unload at night in Ausman, and then it would be dead easy for his henchmen here to get the stuff—small but very valuable commodities like drugs—to any of the nearby cities in all kinds of ways. If half the mail and express of this town contained some, and the autos carried considerable, and even people making personal trips on the train should carry gripfuls of it to deliver to designated agents——"

"They never would stand a chance of being searched, either," Correll declared. "Lieutenant, unless our original idee is dead wrong—about Fitzpatrick actually being the toad in this —— peculiar puddle—I'll stake a nickel or two we ain't far off."

"—— if I don't believe Correll is right," Carruthers stated. "Say all these spigs, or most of 'em, were under Fitzpatrick's thumb, and a lot of the white men, including the big bugs like Dale, the town marshal, and Mr. Weston, and this Balavo—why thousands of dollars' worth of stuff a week could pass through here and nobody know!"

"Well, here's our chariot," said Tex, uncoiling his long length lazily. "Let's hie to the house of the fair invalid and her St. Vitus daddy—bless him for dropping that hint!"

"I'll bet it cost him somethin', too," said Correll as they walked toward the car. "I believe we—or rather you—have got the jump on his nibs, lieutenant."

"Once before I was lucky enough to have advance information about him, and it netted me two thousand bucks," MacDowell remarked. "If I've got it again, and in some way or other could rook him once more, I'd cheerfully donate that two thousand and a lot more."

"Here's hoping," said Carruthers. Correll didn't say anything, but he thought to himself, "I may be in my second childhood, but I smell something coming. If it comes, my bets are that the lieutenant won't come in last!"

A few minutes later the two flyers were greeting Corinne, who was reclining on a lounge which had been moved to the porch.

They were talking gaily as her father's car drove up to the gate.

Mr. Weston strode up the path hurriedly, his gaunt face looking even worse than it had the day before.

"Afternoon, afternoon, boys. And how's the little girl this afternoon?"

"Doing nicely, thank you," she replied as he bent and kissed her lightly. "The arm's not so bad and I've had a lot of callers—'Daddy George' was here quite a while this afternoon."

"So he said, so he said," her father said, fanning himself rapidly with his hat. "Old fellow that's been with me for years and years—employ him as a night-watchman at the store just to give him something to do. Lives in a little shack over at the other end o' town. Quite an old character."

Though the description was for the benefit of the flyers, their host did not look at them directly a single time. His eyes darted rapidly from object to object, never focusing for more than an instant.

Corinne's eyes were shadowed with worry as she looked at her father, and some of the brightness left her face.

"Father's too modest to tell it himself, but several years ago he sent Daddy and his wife, Aunt Judy, out to California to try and save poor Aunt Judy's life. She did live several months longer on account of it. Since then Daddy has been like a shadow—always with us. We were living in El Paso then."

"Mind if I smoke?" inquired Tex casually.

"Of course not! I wouldn't know father without a cigar!" laughed the girl.

As he rolled the cigaret Tex glanced up at Carruthers to see whether Corinne's remark about living in El Paso had made any impression on him, but Carruthers had neither eyes nor thoughts for anything but Corinne.

"A rattlesnake might be clicking his tail within two feet of Jack and he'd never know it right this minute," Tex remarked to himself, lighting the slim cigaret which was a counterpart of his father's favorite smoke.

"Mr. MacDowell, have you ever seen my chickens? Got some pure-bred White Leghorns—greatest layers in the world—greatest layers in the world," said Mr. Weston abruptly, removing his half-chewed cigar and clawing at his thin Vandyke nervously.

"No, and I'd sure like to see them," returned Tex.

"Excuse us a minute—won't take but a minute," said Mr. Weston, and he and Tex disappeared around the corner of the house.

CARRUTHERS and the girl were silent a moment. Finally Corinne took her eyes from the battered automobile which was still waiting a few yards down the driveway and looked at Carruthers, her hazel eyes dark and troubled.

"I'm so worried about dad," she said with a little catch in her voice.

"He—he doesn't seem to be very well," said Carruthers awkwardly.

"I can't imagine what is the matter with him, but ever since we came here he has been different. I went to San Marcos to school a couple of years, and when I got back two years ago I noticed the change in him. Sometimes he's so queer—and somehow it seems to me that today he is worse than he has ever been."

She gazed moodily into the distance, her face reflecting her worried thoughts. Carruthers was at a loss—he himself felt as if he had known her for months instead of days, but he was afraid of presuming to try to comfort her.

"I can't understand why we ever came here," she said at length. "He was in a bank in El Paso, and then after mother died we came to Ausman and he bought the store. It was a very small place then. We didn't know a soul here, except Daddy George, and he came with us."

Like a flash the thought came to Carruthers that had come to Tex at the first mention of El Paso. It was almost a certainty that Mr. Weston had come to Ausman at the behest of Dave Fitzpatrick. Suddenly unutterable pity welled up in the young pilot's heart for the girl, so helpless to combat the forces which must be slowly tearing her father to pieces.

He dropped beside her on the lounge and impulsively placed his hand over hers.

"Miss Weston, you haven't known me—us—long but believe me if there ever is anything we can do for you—if we can help you in any way at all——"

Quick tears welled into her eyes and her voice was unsteady.

"Thanks so much. I'm sure you would," she said. "You can't imagine what a relief it is just to talk to somebody about it. There isn't a soul in this miserable place to whom I feel that I could even hint at anything so personal."

She withdrew her hand slowly and dabbed at her eyes.

"By the way," said Carruthers, "have you or your father heard from Balavo? I understand he owns the big casino, or whatever you call it, in town."

"Oh, yes. He was in to see father and wanted to pay for the little Ford and everything. He wanted to see me too, but I can't stand him. He tries to come to the house quite often."

The flyers had told neither Corinne nor Mr. Weston about their fracas with the Mexican or the reason for it, and apparently Corinne had no idea that anything more than the wreck itself had happened.

Tex and Mr. Weston came around the corner of the house, and Carruthers got to his feet. He held out his hand, and his handsome face was very serious as he said rapidly,

"Don't forget what I said, Miss Weston—and if we leave too soon I'm coming back to Ausman!"

"Well, we're going to lose our charioteer unless we hike," came MacDowell's voice. "We're sure glad the invalid is progressing so well. The effects of the upper ozone on the health are very salubrious, apparently."

Corinne smiled and then became serious as she returned MacDowell's regard.

"I've not said much, but I know just what chances you must have taken for me, Mr. MacDowell," she said.

Carruthers observed that Tex showed in his eyes that his interview with Mr. Weston had brought forth something that evidently meant excitement ahead, for they were literally blazing. His light-hearted words bore out the suspicion, for he said:

"They say I carried a valuable load into San Antone a while ago, but I guess it was a more valuable one I landed in Ausman!"

It was the first time he had ever publicly alluded to his public branding as a trafficker in illicit goods, and as the two flyers went down the roadway toward the car Corinne's gaze followed Tex steadily.

Her father, too, was watching the two army men, and his eyes were the mirrors of utter misery.

XI

THE little office in the rear of the Weston general store was full to overflowing. Mr. Weston, chewing his finger nail as he slowly crumpled a cigar to bits with the other hand, sat at his desk. Blackie Stearns, who had spent a day in close confinement up-stairs, was perched on the safe. Vancouver B. Dale, fat and perspiring representative of law and order for the village of Ausman, completely hid the straight-backed chair which seemed utterly inadequate to hold him up.

Beers, the hard-faced, cold-eyed ex-cowboy whom Tex had caused much misery months before when the flyer had sent him back to Dave Fitzpatrick minus two thousand dollars of the smuggling monarch's money, occupied the remaining chair. His business suit made him look uncomfortable and out-of-character.

Outside the office, in the dim shadows of the store, a vague figure could be seen resting comfortably on a pile of gaudy blankets. It was Daddy George, the patriarchal night watchman.

"Well, I wish old Fitzpatrick would hurry up," remarked Stearns, the deep wrinkle between his heavy brows as obvious as always. "I sure would like to know what's going to be pulled off."

His careless observation seemed almost to shock the others. Dale and Mr. Weston glanced upward instinctively as if they were afraid some one had overheard.

"Well, I'll gamble it's going to be good," stated Dale, whose small eyes were mere pin-points peering forth from folds of flesh.

"You're —— right," agreed Beers with his thin-lipped smile.

"Let's not talk about it—let's not talk about it," grated the storekeeper, leaping to his feet as if his endurance was at an end.

He looked out into the store for a moment, and then resumed his seat, a fresh cigar in his mouth.

"Why so worked up, old socks?" inquired Stearns flippantly.

"Shut your fool mouth!" snapped Beers.

Stearns' face went dark with passion, but his retort was checked by the appearance of Daddy George in the doorway. His long white beard fell half-way to his waist. A battered old sombrero of huge dimensions was set well back on his head.

"Got a match, Jamey?" he asked of Mr. Weston, a brown paper cigaret in his thin hands.

"Plenty, Dad," returned Mr. Weston with a forced smile, and handed the old man a boxful.

Daddy George peered near-sightedly at the other men in the room, but apparently could not recognize them in the dim light of a flickering oil lamp, for he did not speak to either Beers or Dale. He shuffled out into the store again, a revolver swinging well back on his hip.

"Some night-watchman," grinned Stearns, who apparently had forgotten his wrath.

"He's an old employee and friend of mine—friend of mine," answered Mr. Weston. "Just does him good to think he's doing something."

"Oh, he must be the old boy Searles is staying with, isn't he?" queried Stearns.

"Yeah, he's the one. Got a little shack out on the edge o' town. He thinks Searles is the king of the herd," said Beers.

"Does he know how Searles makes his livin'?" asked Stearns.

Mr. Weston's face twitched at the blunt question, and Beers and Dale flushed.

"None o' your business what he knows. No, he don't know anything, and let me tell you, mister——"

Searles stepped quietly into the office through the back door, his boot-heels clumping on the floor.

"Let's mosey," he said, and without a word the four men followed him out the door and up the outside steps that led to the second story.

Not a word was spoken as they filed in, through the cluttered little room with the rumpled cot where Stearns had slept, and then into a narrow hallway. Searles opened the first door and led the way into a large room, lighted by a big kerosene lamp.

Dave Fitzpatrick was seated in the further corner, partially in the shadow. He neither moved nor spoke as his visitors filed in and took seats—three of them on the bed and Mr. Weston and Searles on the remaining chairs. Except Searles, every man seemed constrained and ill at ease—Stearns' flippancy had entirely disappeared, and Dale could not have been more stiff and self-effacing if he had been in the presence of royalty.

"From the fact that I am here you can figure just how important this matter is going to be," began Fitzpatrick without preamble. "Listen, and don't make any mistakes."

The level, expressionless voice was as flat and cold as always. There was an indefinable chill about the man—Stearns had the thought that if he should touch Fitzpatrick the very flesh would be cold and clammy. The smuggler was dressed in a gray sack suit and soft shirt, and his arms were resting on the arms of his chair, the hands flat and motionless.

"Tomorrow afternoon a note will be delivered to MacDowell which will ask him to meet your daughter, Weston, out at the shack behind your house, at nine o'clock. Balavo is getting the note ready. It will be a creditable forgery, and will be so worded that it will keep MacDowell out until after ten. The note will make it imperative that he make his way there without being seen. This will——"

"My ——, Mr. Fitzpatrick, don't bring my daughter into this!" exclaimed Mr. Weston, his gaunt face and unhealthly bright eyes beseeching. "I——"

"This will serve to keep MacDowell out of sight of everybody for two hours," went on Fitzpatrick unemotionally.

Not by so much as a glance of the narrow, unwinking eyes had he paid attention to the distraught Mr. Weston's plea. The merchant sank back on the bed, trembling as though from ague, as the stony voice went on:

"You, Weston, will be working late at your office, and there will be a thousand dollars in cash in the open safe. You, Stearns, dressed in a pair of breeches and puttees and a long raincoat, wearing a mask, will come in the back door of the office and hold Weston up. He will call the night-watchman before you apparently choke him. Probably the watchman will come running, and you apparently will not see him until he's close. Weston, you'll fall on the floor so the doddering old fool won't be afraid to shoot. Searles will have put blank cartridges into his gun—he's staying with him, as usual when he's here—and can do it."

Dale, Stearns, Beers and Weston were listening now as if the massive figure in the chair had hypnotized them. They were as motionless as Fitzpatrick himself, all except Mr. Weston, to whom it was a physical impossibility to keep still. Searles, his bowed legs crossed comfortably, smoked and gazed tranquilly at the ceiling.

"There will be little noise made, and that will be far from the street. Very few people will be out, anyway. Dale, you will be near by and get there immediately after Stearns has overpowered the watchman and left. The night watchman will give you a general description. You'll pick up MacDowell in the hotel. The thousand dollars will be hid in his mattress. Smith the hotel-keeper, will do that. He will not have an excuse—if he speaks of the note, it will have been destroyed because the girl asked it, and he won't be able to produce it. He wouldn't think of not doing what she asked him to. He will not have any alibi, on account of sneaking away to answer the note, and going a roundabout way deliberately trying to avoid being seen, at the girl's request. After the arrest he will be taken to the county seat, the watchman, Weston and Dale will appear as witnesses against him, and MacDowell will be roped and hog-tied."

"But—but why on earth should you do this to him, Mr. Fitzpatrick?" gulped the agonized Weston. "Why——"

"Do you understand exactly what you're to do, Weston?" returned Fitzpatrick evenly.

"But he—he almost saved my daughter's life!" wailed the store-keeper, now totally without control over himself. "Mr. Fitzpatrick, I—I can't do it!"

It was a hysterical burst of defiance. Fitzpatrick, his eyes snakelike and his voice as void of emphasis or expression as ever, let his gaze dwell for a moment on the thin, twitching man before him.

"You think so much of your daughter that you will probably look forward to her visits in jail, then, Weston," he said evenly.

Dale licked his thick lips and stole a glance at Weston. Beers looked steadily at the floor. To both these men Mr. Weston had been a figure imposing and authoritative, a high-ranking lieutenant to the chief. The hint in Fitzpatrick's last words was a surprize to them both. Searles smoked quietly. Stearns had his bold black eyes glued to Fitzpatrick's face.

"But—but won't you tell me what you have against him?" begged Mr. Weston. "I—God help me, I'll do it, but——"

He caught a glance from Fitzpatrick's eyes, and his hoarse, jerky words ceased abruptly. Beers had told him of Fitzpatrick's desire to frame MacDowell, but did not know what the smuggler had against him. The relentless venom that permeated Fitzpatrick's every word—the depth of cold hatred and resolve that seemed to radiate from the man—paralyzed the resistance of Mr. Weston, who seemed like a bird struggling futilely in a fowler's net.

Stearns lit a cigaret with shaking fingers that he strove to keep steady. To him there was an atmosphere of tension in the room that affected him strangely. The air seemed filled with the sinister spirit of Fitzpatrick. His influence appeared to be telepathic; without the aid of emphasis by word, voice or action the spirit of the man saturated the consciousness of his henchmen.

"Now, as to details," resumed Fitzpatrick evenly, and for an hour, point by point and man by man the group went over the frame-up.

Nothing was so trivial that the chief had not provided for it. The perfection of the scheme was very clear to the slowest intellect there. MacDowell without an alibi because he had used every effort to avoid being seen; his only explanation of where he had been a note that he could not produce and of which the supposed writer knew nothing; the absolutely sincere, although vague, testimony of the duped old night-watchman, backed by the definite perjury of Dale and Weston; the fact that not a soul in Ausman, excepting those who were in the project, knew of Stearns' presence in the town. The nearsighted old watchman would have no idea as to who he was—probably could not even swear that Dale or Beers, whom he knew, had been in Mr. Weston's office when he had appeared for a match.

Finally everybody but Searles left. As the four men filed down the steps they took deep breaths as though they had just freed themselves from the influence of something uncomfortable and depressing. A personal interview with Fitzpatrick was an event even to them — he realized the effectiveness of keeping himself personally unknown. To all but a very few of his underlings he was an impersonal, much-dreaded force that was ever in the background, little known but always apparent.

His last words were burned into their minds as they separated at the foot of the steps:

"Remember the importance of what you have to do—and who and what you are."

His cold contempt for them made them wince, but the inference, while it meant different things to the different men, was unpleasantly remindful to them all.

XII

"NO, DAD, I ain't aimin' to leave until tomorrow," Searles replied to a question of the old man's.

The two were sitting in front of the isolated little shack, built of unpainted boards chinked with clay, that the old man had occupied since he had accompanied his patron, Mr. Weston, to Ausman. It was afternoon of the day set for the final subjection of Tex MacDowell.

"I'm glad of it, Jim, boy," returned the old man with a little cackling laugh of pleasure.

He sucked an old corncob contentedly as he sat tilted back against the wall of the shack in an old chair. Searles was squatting on his heels, hat tilted to keep the rays of the westering sun from his eyes.

"I sure am glad," reiterated Daddy George at length. "Outside o' Mr. Weston, there ain't a man I'd rather talk to than you, Jim. Sure does make a feller feel good to have you stay with him once in a while, boy."

The "boy's" wrinkled, weatherbitten face became even more creased with deep-cut lines as he smiled one of his rare smiles. Somehow the utter devotion of the old man to Mr. Weston, whom he swore was the nearest thing to an angel that ever walked the earth, always appealed to the tranquil Searles as having more than its share of irony.

The old man glanced at Searles, his kind old eyes full of affectionate regard.

"Jim, ain't it been long enough since your scrape in New Mexico so's you could come back and be a regular American agin?" he asked at length. "Shucks, boy, folks has forgotten that in this part o' the country years ago, if they ever knew it. I dunno just what ye do for a livin', Jim, but 'pears like you ramble around an awful lot. How about it?"

"Oh, I'm gettin' along fine, Dad," rejoined Searles quietly.

Inwardly he had been turning over in his mind for some weeks a certain idea that was gradually growing stronger. Perhaps the steadily deepening conviction that the slightest slip he made in carrying out Fitzpatrick's orders would mean his ruin much more surely than a complete break from his chief, had something to do with it.

Should he strike out for himself there was a strong possibility that he would never meet any one who would remember him. Should he fail Fitzpatrick, that coldly vindictive, utterly pitiless man would cast him aside like a broken piece of machinery and see to it that the old scrape was revived with evidence enough to freshen people's minds.

Take Weasel Williams, for instance, reflected Searles. Except Searles himself, he was the fastest man on the draw in the border country. He had served Fitzpatrick well in many a difficult, nasty project. He didn't succeed in stealing the invention of MacDowell and Sergeant Cary, at McMullen, and now Fitzpatrick was seeing to it that he would get more years in jail than that particular crime warranted.

"Well, I may settle down in the U. S. some day, Dad, but not right now," he stated at length. "When I get a little more of a stake——"

"You're the best judge, boy. I ain't tryin' to butt in none," interrupted the old man quickly. "Don't make no difference to me, except for your own sake."

"I know—I know," Searles assured him.

It was a queer friendship between the outlaw and the gentle old man. Daddy George had once been desert rat, miner, cowboy, in the days of his long vanished youth. Years before he had done a great service to Searles in El Paso, and from that time on, at intervals, Searles had made it a point to drift in occasionally, to the old man's great delight. He would often recall with the pathetic pride of an old man the time he had picked up Searles, almost shot to death, in a dim side street of the "line" in El Paso, and nursed him back to health with the aid of Aunt Judy.

"I wonder where Dave'll go when he finishes gettin' this here flyer?" mused Searles. "That shore would suit me to the ground. —— if I ain't reached pretty near the end o' my rope. Dave is a wonder, but then I got so I don't enjoy havin' him dig me too much. Lord, but think o' what some o' these fellows like Weston is gettin'!"

Daddy George broke in on the tenor of his thoughts by remarking:

"Corinne sure looked purty as a picture today. Her arm is mendin' fine. I wish you knew her, Jim. As fine a gal as ever was in Texas. Lord, I remember when she wasn't nothin' but——"

"I ain't much of a hand with the women, Dad," drawled Searles dryly. "Not for ten years back."

"Don't get remindin' yourself o' that," the old man interjected decisively, his thin face troubled.

"Oh, I ain't sensitive. I understand them two young aviators that's down here are kind o' shinin' up to her."

"I dunno, mebbe they are. I'm glad of it if it is true. The girl needs some upstandin', bright young fellers for company. There ain't nobody in Ausman she'd look at—there ain't one of 'em fit to black her boots. In fact, I shouldn't say there was anybody that was, come to think, considerin' that Jamey Weston is her daddy besides. You've heard about how them flyers brought her in in their airyplane, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes—I think you told me," said Searles hastily.

Somehow or other he didn't like to think of young MacDowell. He remembered vividly the picture of the tall pilot, his eyes flashing with the joy of combat, standing at that poker table in El Paso with drawn gun while his partner, Ransom, dragged in the money MacDowell had won by outwitting Beers and Aldez, the Mexican.

Searles himself had just been inducted into the game to make the fourth player; the other two were responsible, and he had actually enjoyed the scene. He had heard much of Roaring Bill MacDowell in the old days. His son was certainly not far behind him.

"Thought I'd passed the diaper days, but

—— if I'm stuck on tonight's job," reflected the outlaw. "It's —— foolish, but I'm plumb delighted that all I've got to do is done, and don't amount to much, at that."

He had changed the shells in Dad's gun as it hung in the holster beside his bed that morning, while the old man slept. There were six blanks in the long-barreled six-shooter now, and likewise in its twin, which the old man kept hanging on the wall.

TEX, Carruthers and Correll were on their way home. They were walking tonight. Their young chauffeur was busy elsewhere, for the first time.

The past three days had been uneventful—disappointingly so—but full of hard work for the airmen. After getting the motor fixed and running it for a few moments to make sure it was all right, they had spent a solid half-day looking up a four-mule team with which to drag the ship into the field where Tex and Carruthers had landed theirs.

Then came the tedious work of rerigging the completely loosened fuselage and wings. An airplane fuselage is a series of cubes, composed of four wooden longerons running from nose to tail, with cross-braces every few inches on top and bottom and struts running up and down. Crossed drift and anti-drift wires are stretched between each pair of corners of each cube.

To rerig the fuselage it was necessary to get the ship in flying-position by means of propping up the tail until a level on the top longeron showed the bubble standing exactly in the middle, and then start at the nose and work back to the tail, painstakingly rigging each cube until it was absolutely four-square. This was done by tightening and loosening wires.

Should one of the sections be the least bit out of line, all the following ones would pyramid the error. In that case the warped fuselage would result in loss of airspeed, and would help throw the wings out of line. Many times the disgusted flyers found that after carefully getting one panel lined, the lining of the next one would pull the preceding one out again. It had been tedious, painfully accurate work with an insufficient tool-kit, and now at the end of three days it was done, although the wings still were unrigged. This, however, was not so difficult a job.

Every day the two flyers had called on Corinne after work was over, and for the last two evenings Carruthers had made individual descents on the Weston domicile. Corinne almost forgot her unhappiness under the influence of MacDowell's humor and Carruthers' open devotion. She felt as if she had allies now—and for two years she had been alone, as far as the companionship of youth was concerned.

Little by little the two flyers, especially Carruthers, heard from her lips the story of the disintegration of James Weston. They did not hint at what they conceived to be the real reason for his unexplained move from El Paso to Ausman, and his change from a happy, contented man to one moody, nervous and irritable.

Carruthers was made happy by the presence of Corinne, but for Tex himself the days had been disappointing. Not a ripple disturbed the placid current of existence in Ausman. Mr. Weston had habitually avoided the flyers since the day when, with the excuse of showing MacDowell his chickens, he had begged him again to leave Ausman.

THERE was but one incident that might be twisted to fit the theory that Dave Fitzpatrick was the power behind the throne in Ausman. The incident had happened the day before.

It was immediately after supper, and Tex was walking past Balavo's place, by himself. The stout, bejeweled Mexican came to the door as Tex passed. The flyer looked at him, a half-smile on his face. He expected that Balavo would show some signs of rancor, judging from his actions at their first meeting.

However, Balavo hurried out to meet MacDowell, shook hands effusively and invited him to come in. Tex refused; his natural course of action would have been to accept, even if he had known that he was putting himself in some danger, but in Ausman he was a man of one idea. Balavo had almost cringed in his efforts to square himself for what he had done out at the wreck, and went out of his way to hint that there were no hard feelings on his part about the beating he had received, and that there would be no attempt at retaliation.

In MacDowell's mind there was the thought that perhaps Balavo had heard his master's voice—that orders had gone out to avoid any friction with the stranger until the big event took place. It did not seem natural, some way, for Balavo to change so completely from the vicious wrath and murderous desire for revenge he had shown four days before. Tex knew Mexicans, and their outstanding trait was not a tendency to forgive an injury. In addition, Balavo appeared to have both means and power, and was in a most excellent position to make things hot for Tex in Ausman.

All these things were running through MacDowell's mind as the three airmen walked slowly down the main street and turned toward the hotel. The walk had been a silent one. All three were tired and hot.

"I hardly feel like a trip up to Weston's," remarked Tex as the three seated themselves on the edge of the veranda for a moment before going in.

"You might as well. You know it means a lot to Corinne to have somebody come in and sort of break the monotony," replied Carruthers, fanning himself with an old newspaper that had been thrown on the veranda floor.

Mrs. Smith, manager, owner, cook and chambermaid of the hotel, came out the door with two letters in her hand.

"Some mail for you, Mr. MacDowell," she announced.

Tex looked curiously to see who was writing him at Ausman.

One was from his father, forwarded from Donovan Field. He ripped open the flap and glanced through it quickly.

"Dad's busy, all right," he told the others after he had finished. "He says the rangers, the cavalry and all the Customs men and police along the border are getting busy as ——. Old Bill Trowbridge, sheriff of Hidalgo County, is right in the van. He helped me out on getting Weasel Williams when he stole that carbureter of Cary's and mine, you know. They've pulled a lot of thugs already all along the border, but so far nobody'll talk. Trowbridge has been trying to get wind of who might have planted that opium in our ship. There was a strange spig, pretty well dressed, that was around McMullen and was seen with a soldier just before it happened, but they can't find hair nor hide of him. They're trying to spot the soldier now."

"Well, that isn't so bad," Correll remarked. "Apparently your father is getting more action then we are, in spite o' all our big talk a few days ago."

Tex was turning the other letter over in his hand. It was unstamped, evidently having been left at the hotel without going through the post office. It was addressed in a woman's handwriting.

"Oh, ho-o-o!" gibed Carruthers as he caught sight of the writing on the plain white linen envelope. "So in spite of all your good advice to me you've been making hay while the sun shone with some rural belle, have you? Breaking her heart with your smart city——"

"Not so far as I know," responded Tex. "I haven't the least idea who this is from." He opened it as he spoke.

"It's your fatal beauty and your winning ways, Tex."

Tex did not respond. His eyes were glued to the note before him. He read it with swiftly mounting surprize.

My dear Lieutenant MacDowell:

I have thought and thought before sending you this, but you are the only one I have to turn to in this particular matter. That is, I feel that you are.

There is something that I simply must tell you. I am almost crazy with worry and fear of what seems bound to happen unless by some means or other it can be averted. I know how strange and silly it must seem to you for me to write all this, but I must ask some one for help.

Will you please—*please* Mr. MacDowell—meet me for just a few moments at that little shack on top of the hill directly behind our house? I can walk that far now. I will tell the housekeeper that I feel very badly and go to bed and lock the door. I can slip out easily. Try to keep Mr. Carruthers from coming tonight, someway. If he should Mrs. Bird will tell him I am ill.

Please destroy this note immediately, and don't let any one see you tonight as you come. It would be horribly embarrassing to me—perhaps worse than that, if a living soul should know. It will be dark by the time you start, and by walking up the Gulf shore and then over no one will see you. If I am a little late, please wait, because I must see you. I am throwing myself on your good graces—don't misjudge me, and believe me when I say that almost nothing would tempt me to do this except what has happened. Hastily,

Corinne Weston.

P.S. If you get this before you come this afternoon, do not even hint anything about it. I would rather you wouldn't call this afternoon—let Mr. Carruthers come alone. Please do this. I will explain it all tonight. C. W.

The note was closely written, in a fine, precise handwriting. The paper was plain white linen of good quality. Tex read it for the second time.

Somehow or other, that instinctive sense of danger that is so much a part of outdoor folk sounded a warning call. Had he not been keyed up to a state of watchfulness probably it would have never occurred to him even to think of suspecting the genuineness of the note. Had he been the sort of man to whom girls make a special appeal, and had the thought of doing so lovely a one as Corinne Weston a favor smacked of romance, he would have undoubtedly been so pleasantly excited over the possibilities ahead that nothing else would matter.

As it was, the keen mind and hard common sense that were his heritage from his hardy pioneer father began to get in their work. He was living in the expectation of an opportunity to come to grips with the enemy he felt was entrenched in Ausman, and every person and incident within his ken were examined suspiciously. Looking at the note from that angle, somehow or other it did not ring true.

As he sat silently on the edge of the veranda, the two other men watching him curiously, his mind was working with lightning-like speed, searching out the possible bases for suspecting the note. For instance, it would be natural for Corinne to call on Carruthers if she really needed aid of some kind.

Why should she pick MacDowell in preference to Jack? Why should a mysterious note be used, when she would have every opportunity that afternoon to speak to him personally, at least for long enough to indicate what she wanted? Why should so much secretiveness be emphasized, when it would not be any suspicious circumstance to have him make an open call, as he and Carruthers had been doing for several days?

"Jack, come over here a minute. I've got something I want to talk to you about. Excuse us, Correll."

Carruthers followed him over to the edge of the bank that fell away to the Gulf, fifty feet below. Tex had decided to obey the prompting of the inner sense that warned him. In the old days the MacDowell luck had been talked of throughout Texas, when Roaring Bill was making winnings at poker that opened the eyes of men even in those days of high play, or cleaving his way through obstacles that seemed insurmountable when rustlers and bad-men assisted nature in making life a continual struggle.

But back of that luck was the audacious spirit and fighting sense of the clan. MacDowell luck was responsible perhaps for the providential warning that had come to Tex before his passage at arms with Fitzpatrick in El Paso, but it was the timber of the man that had accounted for his coming away with two thousand dollars which had been bled from his enemy. Right now he was staking much on his instinct that there was more to that note signed "Corinne Weston" than appeared on the surface.

"Jack, listen to this."

Tex read the note slowly, aloud. When he had finished he raised his eyes to Carruthers' flushed face.

"You may think I'm a cad, Jack, but I have no prejudice against confiding in you—even if I believed the note to be *bona fide*."

Carruthers looked up in surprize. The note had hurt him, for he was very much in love.

"You mean you don't think it's O. K.?" he queried hopefully.

"I'm inclined to think not. I may be too suspicious, but listen."

One by one he gave his reasons.

"Now, on the other side, what would a faked note do? It would keep me out of sight of everybody for two hours. If Fitzpatrick is at work and is trying to frame me, it would very probably suit his convenience perfectly to have me out of the way completely for two hours. It may be to plant something in my room at the hotel—almost any crime could be fastened on me in this town unless I had a bullet-proof alibi. What do you think?"

Carruthers did not answer for a moment. He had forgotten the pain he had felt when Tex had read the note—he was thinking now of the possibly approaching climax that Tex had been looking forward to ever since he had seen Beers.

"The more I think about it the more reasonable it looks to me, old man," he said finally. "And another reason that you haven't mentioned: I don't believe Corinne would send a note quite like that."

"Neither do I—not to me, anyhow. Now here's my scheme. It can't get you in wrong—if the note is really straight it may make me somewhat unpopular in the Weston sector, but that'll be my hard luck. You go up to call on her this afternoon, and mention the fact that you saw me reading a note and just happened to see the signature.

which you thought was hers. It can be in sort of a kidding vein, you know. If the note was straight, she'll be embarrassed and show it—that girl couldn't deceive anybody on a thing like that. It will be easy for you to find out, I think. I hate to ask you, Jack, but I believe things may be due to break, and I'm passing no bets!"

The fine gray eyes were alight with expectation and determination, as Tex mentioned the thing he devoutly hoped would happen. It was not the careless, reckless joy in struggle for its own sake, although that was a part of it. It was largely the fierce satisfaction of a man who sees a chance to fight his way out of a tight corner, pitting his strength against his enemy's with a fighting chance to win.

"Why, I'll be tickled to death to do it, Tex, and I'm started right now!" declared Carruthers.

He suited action to the words, and departed at a half-run for a short clean-up in the hotel. Tex, his mind full of the many possible ramifications of his situation, walked slowly back to where Correll was still sitting contentedly on the edge of the veranda.

"Sergeant, there's just a chance that things are due to break tonight. I can't tell you right now, but when Jack gets back I can. If my suspicions are correct, it may be a big night for the Air Service, whether it affects the status of the service's only opium smuggler or not."

"I hope to —— you're right, lieutenant," said the grizzled old Army man.

* * *

"YOU know I'm jealous of Tex MacDowell," smiled Carruthers.

He and Corinne were seated on the big, comfortable lounge where Corinne spent most of the day.

"Why?" she asked. "I hear he's a wonderful flyer, but it seems to me his present situation is far from an enviable one."

"Oh, I know. I wasn't thinking of that. You know that son-of-a-gun got a note from some girl here in Ausman today. These movie idols——"

"Some girl in Ausman!" laughed Corinne surprizedly. "Why I can't imagine who it could be. There aren't more then eight or ten girls here."

"I just happened to glance over MacDowell's way and saw the signature, besides," stated Carruthers with mock solemnity.

"You didn't! Tell me who it was—please. I won't tell a soul, I swear I won't!"

Her eyes were brimming with delighted anticipation as she begged him to tell her. She was dressed in white, today, and the color was commencing to return to her face. She was dangerously charming at that moment, reflected Carruthers with a sort of half-frightened happiness flooding through him.

"It looked like Corinne Weston to me!" he laughed, hiding the bluntness of his words behind his mirth.

"Oh, that's mean!" she reproached him. "Here you get me all worked up about a budding romance with one of the village belles, and it's all a story. Or is it?"

Carruthers was now thoroughly satisfied. Tense expectancy ran through him like fire. In the happiness of frequent calls on Corinne plus the hard work on the ship and the complete lack of any activity on Fitzpatrick's part during the past three days the young flyer had almost forgotten about possible complications with the smuggler. Now however, the apparently sure indication that things were due to break filled his thoughts.

He took a chance and rapidly told Corinne the story. He did not mention her father's warning to Tex, or their suspicions of him. The girl's face was flushed and her great hazel eyes shadowed with indignation as she heard of the note in her name. This did not prevent her from comprehending the bitterness of the struggle between Tex MacDowell and his enemy.

"But what would Fitzpatrick be doing down here in this little town?" she asked when Carruthers finished.

Fearful that she might grasp some connection between her father and the power that was menacing MacDowell, Carruthers strove to change the subject, but without success.

"Do you suppose it would be possible that some one that was a—a little jealous might have written that note to Mr. MacDowell so that they could get a good chance to have a fight with him?" she asked, reddening just a trifle as she met the flyer's eye.

"I don't think so. Besides, anybody that had any eyes could see that I'm the most interested man around the Weston house," returned Carruthers boldly. "What admirers have you that you would suspect of such a nefarious deed?" he went on with a smile.

"That greasy Balayo is always trying to get friendly, and there is George Dale," she returned absently. "But I don't think——"

"No, it's Fitzpatrick, I'm sure," said Carruthers decisively.

Suddenly she caught her breath with a little sob.

"Do—do you suppose my father could be——"

She did not finish. The connection between the letter signed with her name and her father's recently exaggerated peculiarities came to her with paralyzing force. Suddenly she knew the truth, and her shoulders shook with sobs. Before he knew it Carruthers' arms were about her and he was saying foolish things into her ear to comfort her.

The storm was over in a moment, and as she gently freed herself from his embrace she even tried to smile.

"You are all wrong," lied Carruthers. "It was a natural thing for them to do; they knew that Tex and I had done you a little favor and were here a great deal."

"I—I hope so," she returned, as she gave him her hand in farewell. "And you don't know how I'm hoping and praying that all your suspicions are wrong and that it's just some silly joke."

"We're not hoping so," stated Carruthers, turning for an instant at the top of the steps. Mr. Weston's car was approaching, a quarter of a mile down the road. "Corinne, Tex will be primed tonight to not only keep clear of any entanglement, but to get something on Fitzpatrick himself, if he can. And I hear that when MacDowell gets into action, it's pretty to watch. By-by until tomorrow."

CARRUTHERS told Tex his story with blazing eyes and excited speech. The two flyers called Correll, and told him all the details, to that worthy's delighted astonishment.

"Now I believe the lay is this—I've been oiling the old mental wheels as much as they'll stand," said Tex, his words more softly deliberate than usual. "They want me out of the way at nine o'clock. Whether completely out of town or just out of my room and in a place where nobody can see, I don't know. I suggest that Correll stay in my room with the light out, and his gun, in case there should be any attempt at planting stuff. You and I, Carruthers, will sneak out to the supposed meeting-place at the shack, about eight o'clock, to see whether anything is doing out there. I don't believe there is, because so far foul play has not been Fitzpatrick's game. We'll have the hotel-keeper's son go along, if possible, because your unsupported word might not go far.

"At nine o'clock we'll start down-town. It will be a —— good thing to have a lot of people see us—on the outskirts of town, I mean. I believe there is going to be some fake crime pulled off."

He stopped speaking for a minute, apparently deep in thought.

"In case my hunch about a planted robbery, or something, is correct, and in the event that our suspicions of Mr. Weston——"

"Now you're talking, lieutenant," Correll interrupted eagerly.

"Maybe I said a mouthful, and maybe not," said Tex with a grin. "But if I hit the bull's-eye I figure it might be a —— good idea to see what brand that night-watchman carries. If the event takes place at Weston's store, the night-watchman would be fixed some way, wouldn't he?"

"He'd have to be," agreed the excited Carruthers.

"Well, let's stray toward his shack and have a little converse with him. Correll, suppose you look up our kid jitney-driver and fix it for him to go along with us, if you can."

The two flyers came in sight of Daddy George's shack in a few minutes. Two men were discernible sitting in front of it. One of them disappeared while they were still too far away to have any idea what he looked like.

As they came closer and obtained a good view of the patriarchal old man, Tex remarked in low tones,

"He sure doesn't look the part of a thug, does he?"

"More like the kind of a man you'd call uncle," agreed Carruthers.

"Is this Daddy George, sir?" asked Tex with a smile.

"Right, son. And you're them two airplaners that brought Corinne Weston in, aint ye?"

"Yes, sir. We've heard Miss Weston speak of you so much we thought we'd drop in and talk a while with you," said Jack.

"Glad to have ye, boys. Set down,"

returned the old man hospitably. "I'll git another chair——"

"Don't do it," interrupted Tex. "I'll just use the ground."

Carruthers took the chair and Tex squatted on his heels near the cabin wall. They talked of several matters, mostly of the Westons, and all the time Tex was appraising his host. Unless he was utterly misled, Daddy George was incapable of taking in any underhanded, double-crossing frame-up such as the flyers suspected. In that event, either the suspected crime was not to be committed at Weston's store, or else the old man was to be an innocent party.

"Well, boys, I hate to hurry yuh, but I've got to git on the job down to the store," said Daddy George at length. "I'll walk a piece with yuh, if you're goin' back."

"Fine. We're due back for supper right now," said Tex as the three arose from their comfortable positions.

The night-watchman went inside and secured his holster with the big, old-fashioned gun in it, put on his huge, battered Stetson and joined them.

The sight of the gun gave Tex an idea. Somehow it seemed that unless all their carefully built up deductions were wrong, there was something due to happen that night, and Weston's store was the logical location for it, from every angle. He was certain that Daddy George was not involved—the utter simplicity and sincere kindliness that were visible in his looks and actions were not assumed, or else the old man would have been the most wonderful actor of the age. If Daddy George was to be a catspaw, and that man who had left when they came in sight perhaps one of Fitzpatrick's men——

"We chased a visitor of yours away, I'm afraid, when we came in sight," he said casually as they walked down the road.

"Oh, no, no," the old-timer assured him—somewhat nervously, Tex thought. "Just a friend of mine—he was goin' anyhow."

As a matter of fact Searles had left precipitately with explicit instructions that under no circumstances was his name to be mentioned to the flyers. The old man was familiar enough with Searles to know that his visits to Ausman were always inconspicuous, and it did not seem strange to him that Searles had enjoined the strictest secrecy.

Tex walked along silently for a minute, while Carruthers kept the conversation going. If Daddy George was a catspaw, perhaps the plotters would see to it that his gun was unloaded, to avoid taking any chance. It would be an easy matter for a couple of men to bind and gag the night-watchman, without his getting a good look at them, he reflected. It was worth investigating, anyhow.

"I'm sort of interested in that gun of yours, sir," he said at length. "I'm more or less of a nut on guns—brought up on a ranch, you know. Mind if I look at it? Those big old-fashioned six-shooters aren't as common as they used to be."

"You bet they ain't. I've had these guns for thirty years or more—this here one's got a twin back to the house."

He handed Tex the gun. The flyer examined it casually.

"Mind if I take a shot at that old tin can there, just to see how she shoots?" he asked with a smile.

"Go ahead. Let's see what kind of a Texan you be," laughed Daddy George.

Tex cocked it and shot. There was a crack, all right, but no signs of a bullet hitting the ground. No dust was visible.

"Must've been a blank," said the surprized Daddy George. "That's funny. Try another one."

Five more were tried—all blanks.

"By gorry, that's sure a funny circumstance, ain't it?" queried Daddy George. "Bet a cooky the manufacturer got some blanks mixed in with the good shells. Mighty careless business, I'll say. S'pose somebody'd broke in the store some night, and me blazin' away at 'em with blanks!"

"If I were you I'd write the manufacturer. It might mean the difference between life and death some time. I've seen one bad shell in a lot, but never so many."

As he returned the gun the flyer's mind was racing. It was almost a sure thing now—and he would be on the spot when the cap was blown off.

"Well, thanks for the company and the information about the gun," said Daddy George as they approached the store from the rear. They had walked across lots during the last part of the trip, to save time. "I'll git me some shells in the store and load up ag'in."

"Good night, sir. See you again," chorused the flyers.

"Jack, that cinches it cold as a herring," Tex said as they walked toward the hotel. "Those blanks were planted in Daddy George's gun, of course. That means he isn't in it. They'll just put him out of the way, and they put in the blanks to make things sure if he should happen to get a chance to shoot. He won't get the chance, I'm sure. They'll just wallop him with a piece of wood or something, or maybe bind and gag him in the dark store so he can't tell who they are—or maybe just one man will do the job."

"If he should get a chance to shoot—"

"He's an old-timer and there'll probably be one dead crook," said Tex grimly. "We're going to be right on the job around that store, Jack—out of sight somewhere on the outside. We can't work too fast—remember it's possible we're all wrong. If we're right, we've got to be careful to keep clear of the frame-up. We'll be outside, without them knowing it, ready to horn in at the right time. What say?"

"It's the best way, all right. Poor old Daddy George is in for some excitement, I guess."

"Maybe, but we couldn't warn him. You see how he worships Weston; he wouldn't believe it, and remember we're taking a lot for granted. However, he's in no danger. I'm sure Weston wouldn't have consented to anything that would harm the old man. He'll just be carefully put out of the way."

Back at the hotel, Correll reported that he had had no luck in finding the boy—that he would not be back from Acacia until late. When the big non-com heard what Tex had to tell he nodded, his face alight.

"We've got 'em, I do believe," he said. "Go to it, lieutenant, and —— help anybody that comes roving in the hotel tonight!"

XIII

DADDY GEORGE puttered around in the shadows of the big store, covering it slowly from end to end. It was nearly nine o'clock, and only the light that came through the open door of the office illumined the long stretch of floor space and counters. The old watchman usually stayed in the office, but tonight Mr. Weston was working late, and so Daddy George spent his time out in the store to avoid bothering him.

The old man was immersed in contented musing. It was a source of great pride to him to feel that he was worthy of a responsible position in his old age. He had served a good apprenticeship for taking care of Jamey Weston's property, he thought for the thousandth time. He patted the long-barrelled, old-fashioned six-shooter, as he thought back to the days when he had lived the life of the Southwest with all the abandon of hearty, careless youth. He had reloaded his gun upon entering the store.

The old man was dozing off on a pile of blankets when the tall, masked figure of Blackie Stearns slipped in the back door of the office. Mr. Weston, his face gaunt and haggard started as nervously as if the visit was not expected. Stearns had a drawn gun in his hand, for effect. He was swathed in a long coat, but puttees could be glimpsed beneath it.

"Daddy George!" screamed Mr. Weston just as Stearns took hold of him, and like a flash the old man awoke in time to see Stearns throw the apparently lifeless body of the storekeeper to the floor.

Everything was dim to the nearsighted night-watchman, but he could make things out vaguely as he started for the office, his pace slow, perforce, but his spirit unafraid.

Stearns abstracted the thousand dollars from the safe during the few seconds which it took Daddy George to get to the office door. The night-watchman was glad of the fortunate chance through which he had found out about the blanks, and reloaded.

The old man, panting hard, got to the office door as Stearns was apparently trying to get out the door. The watchman, his hand trembling, pulled the trigger. A searing iron seemed to be pressed for an instant against Stearns' arm.

The murderer of Bogie Bill saw red. The pain, the flash-like thought that darted into his mind of a double-cross, the staggering surprize of his wound, all contributed to the swift uprush of ungovernable rage that made his sullen face terrible in its fury. In an instant he had shot Daddy George through the heart.

The old man lay in the flickering lamp light, the gushing blood staining the end of his long white beard.

Mr. Weston, who had been lying on the floor, as was his part, leaped to his feet as the last shot reverberated through the room. With a hysterical cry that was like some wild beast's he leaped for his desk drawer, where he kept his own gun. He never reached it. Stearns dropped him with a shot through the back.

Swiftly as it had come the murderous rage was past, but once again the die was cast for Blackie Stearns. An explanation would do no good—it was time to blow, reflected Stearns with pounding heart but curiously cool mind. He shuddered as though with a chill as he thought of the cold, massive chief upstairs. Like a shadow he slipped out the door, the thousand dollars still in his pocket. In one hand he clutched the air service insignia that had been filched from MacDowell's room, and which Stearns had been planning to drop in the store office.

He had no sooner left and faded into the shadows in the back than Tex MacDowell and Carruthers burst into the office. They had been hidden underneath the loading platform. The pistol cracks had not sounded loudly on the outside, and had come so fast that the whole thing was over before they could reach the office. Stearns had not been a second too soon.

"——! The watchman and Mr. Weston!" breathed Carruthers, skrinking instinctively from the horrible sight the office presented.

Tex dropped quickly beside Mr. Weston. The merchant's eyes opened and the twitching lips smiled.

"What happened, Mr. Weston?" demanded Tex. "How badly are you hurt?"

"Through the back, and it's bad," breathed Mr. Weston. "Is—is Daddy George——"

"He's dead, Mr. Weston," Carruthers told him gently. "And I'm going for a doctor right now."

He bolted out, leaving Tex to support the gray head of the storekeeper in his arms. He staunched the flow of blood as best he could with a handkerchief held tightly to the wound.

"Are you too weak to tell me what happened?" asked Tex eagerly. "We——"

The door burst open and the fat form of Vancouver B. Dale entered the office. As the marshall took in the tableau his heavy, flushed face went gray and he shrank away with stark fear and horror showing in every lineament of his face.

"My—my——!" he whispered.

"The game is up, Van," Mr. Weston told him.

The thin, lined face seemed more peaceful now, and the sunken eyes were not so feverishly bright. As they rested on the body of Daddy George there was an instant when they seemed to flash with bitter wrath. The white-bearded old man had given his life to the patron who was so unworthy of his devotion. Mr. Weston's eyes sought MacDowell's face. Perhaps it was yet possible to atone, somewhat.

"As soon as the doctor comes and gives me a hypodermic or something, there are many things I want to tell you, boy," he said gently, and the sunken eyes roved to Dale's pasty face.

Dale, who was literally paralyzed at the unexpected trend of events, came to life with a snap.

"No, no, Mr. Weston. You can't be going to——"

"I'm going to tell MacDowell everything I know," stated the weakening Weston with unmistakable solemnity. "Hadn't you better get out after Stearns, Dale? You needn't be afraid—there'll be just two names in the confession—Fitzpatrick's and mine. Oh, yes, and Stearns."

Without a word Dale left. Tex held Mr. Weston, stanching the wound as best he could, his mind awhirl with the possible consequences of that night. Evidently there had been some hitch in arrangements, resulting in the death of innocent old Daddy George and probably of Mr. Weston. The wound was very bad.

The sound of a motor was heard outside, and in a moment the doctor came hurrying in. A glance at Daddy George told him the truth, and it only took a short examination of Mr. Weston's wound to make him shake his head sadly, his hard face softening a trifle as he said simply—

"About half an hour, Jim."

"I—I'm glad!" whispered Mr. Weston. "Can you give me strychnine or something so I can talk a little louder?"

The doctor nodded, and prepared a hypodermic.

"I'm going to dictate something to you, Lieutenant MacDowell, and sign it. You and the doctor can witness it. We must hurry. You'll find paper and pencil on the desk."

Before beginning to write Tex got some blankets from the store. With one he covered the peaceful face of Daddy George, and with the others he made Mr. Weston a little more comfortable. Then he began to write at the wounded man's dictation. He had just started when the door opened and Corinne, with Carruthers supporting her, entered and threw herself on her knees beside her father, who smiled faintly as he looked up into her eyes.

She did not burst into a storm of weeping. Her drawn face and the pitiful look in her eyes gave quiet evidence of her grief. Apparently Carruthers had told her what had happened, for she made no attempt to talk to him.

After the hypodermic had been injected and the wound bandaged by the quiet doctor Mr. Weston started to talk. Carruthers knelt on the other side of the wounded man, and the doctor leaned against the safe. Tex sat at the desk to write down Mr. Weston's words. No one there saw Searles, as he stood outside the window for a moment and watched the tableau, shadowed eerily by the dim oil lamp. His eyes rested longest on the motionless body of Daddy George. In a moment he vanished again, seeking Dave Fitzpatrick.

"Don't write this, Mr. MacDowell," said Mr. Weston slowly, as if he was picking his words very carefully. "For years I have lived when it would have been more merciful could I have died. I am going to try to atone a little now—God knows how hard it is going to be to tell the story with you here, daughter."

He smiled faintly as he looked up into her eyes. Her gaze did not falter, and her hand continued to stroke his hot brow slowly.

"I got into the power of Dave Fitzpatrick when my wife became very ill and I went in debt. I took some money from the bank, to speculate with. I lost, as usual, and was facing sure conviction as an embezzler, immediately after Ruth died, when Fitzpatrick made good the shortage, but forced me to sign a confession, which he still holds. The details of the story are too long and various for my strength, but suffice it to say that I am in Ausman—I am what I am—because of the events that started with that moment when I stole money to try and save the life of my wife."

He stopped a moment, a faraway look in his sunken eyes.

"I am going to bare all I know of the man who has dragged me down—held me in iron bands until I am a broken thing that has no right to be called a man. Now you can begin to write, lieutenant."

Line by line MacDowell's pen traveled over the paper, and the story it wrote held few surprizes for either Carruthers or Tex. MacDowell's deductions had been close to the truth. It told of Mr. Weston's position as local representative for Dave Fitzpatrick. The town was practically owned by him—most of the original inhabitants had been bought out or forced out. The Mexicans had been imported, and cultivated fields that were Fitzpatrick's. They were compelled to do their trading at the so-called "Weston Store." and in addition the women made baskets, strings of beads and various sorts of Mexican curios which the store shipped to various dealers in different parts of the country. With every shipment went thousands of dollars' worth of opium, morphine, heroin and other drugs, smuggled into Ausman from a small vessel which Fitzpatrick owned. It plied out of various ports in Mexico, and the contraband was transferred to launches out in the Gulf. Each curio dealer was a Fitzpatrick agent.

By every conceivable means the drugs were carried out of Ausman to points of distribution. In personal suitcases and trunks, in automobiles, even by express and freight, packed in shipments from the store, the stuff was spread over the country. The curio camouflage was the best, of course, because the most extensive. So large had the business grown that there were plans under way to start a small factory wherein blankets, baskets, headdresses, shawls, mantillas and other articles would be made systematically, and the output provide a legitimate excuse for large and frequent shipments which would be the channels for the largest dealing in drugs the United States ever knew.

Mr. Weston did not mention names, aside from Fitzpatrick's, but it was easy to see from the inferences of his halting tale that the law, the business, the very spirit of the town was Dave Fitzpatrick. With the exception of a very few people, whose eyes remained tight shut to what was going on about them, every white person in the town was in some way or other under Fitzpatrick's power. One by one the few people who had originally settled in Ausman had been driven out by fair means or foul—a few of them had disappeared completely.

Year by year the project had grown, and

from its inception Mr. Weston had been the business head of it, representing Fitzpatrick. Never for a moment had he forgotten the baleful influence under which he lived, and steadily he had gone deeper into the morass as Fitzpatrick's hand had pushed him down. The climax was right there in his office, with Daddy George lying dead beside him, he himself approaching death, and his daughter listening to the tale of his utter unworthiness from his own lips.

He was perceptibly weakening as he raised his eyes to Tex, quietly writing at the desk.

"Boy, there is—is so little I can say except this, that I pray may help you. I have told you the story of the plot that was hatched against you by the man who is sitting upstairs now."

Tex started, and Carruthers went white. Then Tex resumed his position facing the desk as he asked gently—

"Is there any more, sir?"

"Yes. If it will help you any, I hereby state that I know that Fitzpatrick is your enemy and that in El Paso months ago he tried to get you in his power, and again here he tried to ruin you. I know almost nothing of Fitzpatrick's operations outside of Ausman—perhaps you yourselves know more than I. But it is my firm belief that if you yourself or the man with you did not know that the opium was in your ship when you became notorious a few weeks ago, after it was found, that Fitzpatrick is at the bottom of it. I base my ideas from the words of men I know are his henchmen, and know more than I. God knows I would have no reason—no reason——"

He could not finish. The doctor injected another hypodermic.

"Quick, let me sign it!" demanded the fast sinking man, and with the last of his strength he wrote a bold "James Weston" at the bottom of the last sheet.

Carruthers held him up while he watched the doctor and Tex witness it, and then the doctor held him while Carruthers added his signature.

He was just finishing it when a great sob came from Corinne. Mr. Weston was dead.

"Take Miss Corinne away, Jack," Tex said gently.

He turned to the doctor.

"Leave everything to me, lieutenant," the doctor said.

He looked around quickly, and then leaned over until his mouth was close to MacDowell's ear.

"I've lived in this town for ten years, and thought I knew something about it, but so help me, I'm astounded, sir, astounded!"

MacDowell wondered just how much surprized the medico was.

"I'll leave it to you, then," he said deliberately. "I've got some business upstairs."

His Army Colt was in his belt. He walked to the door unhurriedly. The doctor watched him in amazement as he disappeared into the darkness. He got a momentary impression of a cleancut face and well-shaped head outlined sharply against the night as Tex inched the door shut from the outside.

The professional man drew a deep breath. He would not have gone upstairs for any reward he could think of, right then.

XIV

EAS SEARLES slowly ascended the stairs after his brief look at the tableau in the office, there was but one thought in his mind. He had come down at Fitzpatrick's behest to find out whether matters were progressing satisfactorily. He had seldom been as completely dumfounded as when he looked in the window and saw Weston and Daddy George on the floor, the two flyers in the office with them.

How matters had gone wrong did not interest him now, but the picture of the whitebearded old man, his thin worn face peaceful in death, affected the outlaw strangely. The gentle old fellow had been the one touch of friendship in a lonely life, for many years, and Searles had not realized just how important a factor in his life the occasional peaceful visits to the old-timer had come to be.

He opened the door of Fitzpatrick's room, but did not enter. He leaned against the door-jamb and slowly rolled a cigaret. Fitzpatrick, his massive figure sunk in a big chair, waited for him to speak.

"Well, Dave, MacDowell's slipped you again, I reckon," Searles said finally, striking a match as he spoke.

Fitzpatrick did not move nor speak. Not by so much as the winking of an eye did he manifest surprize or chagrin.

"The night-watchman is laying down in the office, dead. Weston is badly hurt. He'll kick off in a few minutes, probably. His daughter, them two flyers and the doctor is down there with 'em."

Fitzpatrick's light gray eyes did not change expression, and yet the cold, all-pervading wrath of the man seemed to charge the air of the room. He was terrible in his repression.

The tranquil Searles inhaled a deep draft of smoke and blew it out slowly. His puckered eyes rested on Fitzpatrick's face. He was not at all uncomfortable now—he felt suddenly as if he were freed of a burden, although he knew that never in ten years had the motionless man before him been as dangerous as he was then.

"What went wrong?" asked Fitzpatrick.

His voice ended flatly at the last word. It was more like a statement than a question.

Searles shrugged his shoulders.

"Stearns must have lost his temper or something—I dunno. How the flyers come to be there, instead o' MacDowell bein' up to the shack, I likewise can't figure. Guess you got a little sympathy for the men that tried to get MacDowell before, ain't you? Beers and Weasel——"

"Don't talk so much, Searles. You——"

"I'm aimin' to talk a mouthful now, Dave. I'm quitting—tonight."

There was an interval of a full minute after Searles made his casual announcement. It was a battle of eyes and wills. Fitzpatrick's unwinking gaze did not make Searles' eyes waver, nor did the uncanny force of his chief's will affect him at all.

"You are forgetting, Searles," said Fitzpatrick evently.

"I'm not forgetting a —— thing," Searles contradicted. "Do your ——est, Dave. This fool bug you got to get an upstandin' youngster like MacDowell never did set well with me—he never done nothin' to you. And when I saw old Daddy George layin' down there on the floor, I made up my mind I was through dirtyin' up my hands with your brand o' crookedness any more. *Sabe?*"

"All right, Searles. And you know too much to be surprized at anything that happens."

The depth of hate and venomous determination that somehow was apparent in the colorless words did not surprize Searles, nor did it affect him. He answered as quietly as his former chief had spoken.

"Anything that figures to happen to me had better come shootin', Dave," he stated, and his eyes spoke volumes. "And just let me rise to announce this—that if I figure I'm gonna get caught, I'm just as willin' to get hung for a sheep as a lamb. So if you aim to work on me, work faster than my guns."

There was another interval of silence during which Searles smoked while he watched Fitzpatrick imperturbably. Finally he threw away his cigaret butt and straightened up.

"Well, I'm blowin', Dave. So long. I ain't much on killin' innocent old men—never was. And by the way, if what I saw down-stairs ain't misleadin' as ——, Weston is tellin' everything he knows. You're liable to be findin' that MacDowell's got something on you."

Fitzpatrick's eyes, a certain snakelike quality in them, watched the short, bow-legged figure of his right-hand man disappear down the hall. If the tumbling down of his house of cards in Ausman affected him, a physical outlet for his wrath seemed unnecessary, for he remained as motionless as always in his big chair, his eyes resting on the blank wall in front of him without a flicker of expression in them. Tex MacDowell, creeping quietly down the hall, found him thus as he appeared suddenly in the open doorway, some clothes line in one hand.

"Good evening, Mr. Fitzpatrick," greeted the pilot, his broad shoulders almost filling the doorway.

Fitzpatrick did not answer. He must have known instantly who Tex was, but if he was surprized he gave no sign. The two men who had been waging warfare against each other for months met for the first time, face to face.

"I'm here on a very salubrious errand," Tex went on. "I can't forbear saying a few things of a personal nature right at the start of my call. You'll pardon me if I get personal, won't you?"

The flyer's speech was slow, his attitude almost lazy, but the fire that showed through in his eyes was the fierce joy of battle against the enemy he had come to hate with a hatred that was the cumulation of months. His passages-at-arms with Fitzpatrick had been like a game of wits at first—a game that he enjoyed with the reckless delight of the MacDowells in pitting themselves against odds for the pure satisfaction of the struggle. Lately he had come to appreciate the relentless enmity, utter lack of scruple, and far-reaching power of Fitzpatrick. The two dead men down in the office— Tex could barely hold himself back from leaping at the stony bulk in the chair, although his outward air of carelessness did not betray his feelings.

"Apparently you aren't feeling conversational this evening," the pilot went on slowly. "So before I tie you up—did I forget to tell you I was going to tie you up?—I just wanted to say that of all the murdering, double-crossing, utterly contemptible coyotes I ever met, you're the worst. I'd give a year's pay to lick you with my bare hands, and have dad looking on."

There was something deadly in his words, and Fitzpatrick seemed a statue of incarnate venom. Perhaps he had come to hate the son as he had the father—perhaps merely because he was the son of his father.

"Now we're going to tie you up and lead you away and keep you safe until Mr. Weston's confession gets into the proper hands," drawled Tex. "Having paid you my compliments, let's go."

He had just started for Fitzpatrick when the smuggler got into action. As if shot from a gun the bulky body leaped from the chair, and Fitzpatrick hurled himself at the flyer. Tex had no chance to pull his gun—would not have done so if he could. He welcomed the opportunity for physical conflict with a mirthless smile and blazing eyes.

He met Fitzpatrick's rush with a straight left that numbed his hand, but it did not seem to affect his opponent. Perhaps because it was his only chance to escape, perhaps because of the terrible anger that filled him as the ruin of all his plans loomed before him, Fitzpatrick seemed to possess maniacal strength and endurance. The bulky body was as made of stone, as far as the effect of MacDowell's blows were concerned.

Tex fought coolly, his back to the door. He had the longer reach, but his blows did not make his enemy falter. In a few seconds Fitzpatrick succeeded in getting to close quarters. In a bearlike hug his two great arms met around MacDowell's body.

With awful strength the arms kept closing tighter about Tex, and little by little Fitzpatrick forced him to bend backward. The smuggler's eyes were expressionless, his big square face a mask. It was like being in the folds of a boa constrictor.

Beads of sweat came out on MacDowell's face as with all his strength he fought the relentless pressure that was forcing him farther and farther backward until the pain was horrible. It could last but a few more seconds. Tex, his breath coming in gasps, gathered himself for a last effort. With his hands he exerted all the pressure he could against Fitzpatrick's body.

It was not much, for his arms were bound tightly to his side by Fitzpatrick's grip. As he did so he strove to bend sidewise. All the reserve force in his big body went into the torturing effort. The veins in his forehead stood out like welts, but inch by inch he succeeded in bending his opponent with him, to the right. Finally both men fell; Fitzpatrick's grip loosened a trifle as his wrist took most of the force of the fall. In a flash Tex got loose and was on his feet.

Fitzpatrick was after him, his big form moving with the speed of a panther. He aimed a terrible blow at MacDowell—a right swing. Tex used an old trick he had learned in his college gymnasium. Quick as a cat he bent from the waist, under the blow. As he did so his left foot went forward and with all the force of his body behind it his right hand sunk in Fitzpatrick's stomach.

It seemed as if that blow should have finished him. It did weaken him—for a second or two he staggered. MacDowell's gun clanged to the floor. It had hopped out of his belt as he bent downward.

It bounced under the table, and Fitzpatrick was after it in an instant. He was not quite quick enough. Even as his hand was closing on it MacDowell's foot caught his wrist, and the gun went spinning to the wall.

Fitzpatrick got to his feet, to be met with a straight smash that knocked him down once more. As he got up, he put one hand on the back of a chair as if to help himself. Without warning he swung the chair, so quickly that a leg grazed MacDowell's cheek as he leaped back. It left a red line across one side of his face.

Fitzpatrick went off balance by the force of his swing, and MacDowell rushed in with a vicious one-two with left and right that sent his opponent staggering to the wall.

It was uncanny the way the man kept his feet. He had scarcely touched MacDowell except for the horrible moment when he had succeeded in getting his grip and bending him backward, but the long-armed Tex had landed a dozen blows on Fitzpatrick that carried with them all the force of his superb body, and yet the outlaw kept on.

He rushed again, and once more Tex succeeded in landing a stomach blow. It weakened Fitzpatrick perceptibly. For a half-minute he fought weakly, weathering a storm of blows to the face that left it crimson with blood. And still, with terrible persistence and endurance, he bored in, striving to obtain a body grip once more.

Finally Tex got his chance. He sent Fitzpatrick against the table with a blow under the ear, and for a moment the smuggler hung there, the lamp swaying perilously. Tex put the last of his ebbing strength into two more blows to the stomach, and Fitzpatrick sunk to the floor limply.

The flyer staggered against the table, his breath coming in great gasps. He steadied himself for a moment, and then slowly got the rope which he had dropped by the door, and tied Fitzpatrick's hands and feet. The narrowed, opaque eyes were open, but the great body was momentarily paralyzed. Tex used his handkerchief to wipe the blood from his enemy's face. This done, he got to his feet and buttoned his O. D. shirt, which had been ripped open in the mêlée. He looked down at Fitzpatrick.

"You're a poor benighted heathen, but a first-class fighting man," he quoted.

He picked up his Colt and went out. He was bound for the street to find Vancouver B. Dale. He wondered whether they had succeeded in apprehending Stearns. Somehow or other he did not have much confidence in the professional ability of the Ausman sleuth.

On the stairs he saw the doctor. That gentleman was standing on the bottom platform. Apparently he had been on his way for help to dispose of the bodies within, and had stopped to listen to the noise from above.

"Had a little scrap," Tex told him as he passed.

The street was quiet and dark. Only the tiny, dirty Mexican restaurant showed a light in its windows. Inside there were at least fifteen men, a few of them Mexicans, talking excitedly. Evidently every one was familiar with the principal events of the evening.

Further on, sounds of excited discussion reached MacDowell's ears from within Balavo's place. Tex, obeying a sudden impulse, tried the doors in front. They opened, and he walked in.

There were twenty or more men in the barroom. A couple of Mexican girls stood in the doorway that led into the big room in the rear. Vancouver B. Dale was among the men, all of whom appeared to have been drinking. Silence fell suddenly as the tall army man appeared, his thick brown hair in crazy disorder.

"Did you get Stearns?" he demanded of Dale.

"Not yet. There's three posses out looking for him," stammered Dale.

"You're a —— of a marshall," stated the flyer without heat, his hands stuck negligently in his back pockets. "Come on out, will you? I've got a little job for you."

"I was getting another posse in here," Dale said apologetically.

The events of the evening had made him uncertain of his position—extremely uncertain. He followed Tex out like a lamb.

"I've got Dave Fitzpatrick roped and hog-tied, and I want him put in the lock-up, do you understand?"

They were walking along the street toward the store. The marshal stopped dead in his tracks as MacDowell's words sunk into his brain.

"Put him in the lock-up?" he gulped, his voice ludicrously cracked.

"Right," returned Tex.

"I—I——"

"I don't know just where you stand, Dale, but I don't believe you're precisely sitting on top of the world in this deal," Tex said slowly, his eyes on the marshal's face. "If you want to do as much for yourself as you can, you'd better do as I say."

The shot went home. Without a word they started once more for the store.

"Oh, Tex!" came Carruthers' voice from down the street.

Jack came running down from the corner.

"Have they got Stearns?" he asked eagerly.

"No—the demon policeman here hasn't sleuthed him out yet," returned Tex.

"Anything happened since I left?"

"Considerable," answered Tex. "We'll let old Fitzpatrick lay for a while and think it over. Seat yourselves on yon platform, gents, and let's have a smoke."

Dale refused a cigaret, but Carruthers and MacDowell lit up. Tex told the story of his interview with Fitzpatrick briefly, to Carruthers' vast delight and Dale's unaffected horror.

"And to think I missed it!" mourned Carruthers.

"You sure missed a show. My back is still sore where he threw about half the vertebrae out of joint. I'll be having one of those chiropractors jumping on it, I'll bet, before she gets lined up again. How is Miss Weston?"

"Pretty bad, Tex. That housekeeper of theirs seems to be a pretty good scout, though. I left Corinne with her."

"I wonder if she's got any relatives or anybody to live with?"

"Not a one, the housekeeper told me."

Carruthers did not say so, but he had plans along that line himself.

"Well, let's get Fitzpatrick incarcerated," Tex suggested, throwing away his half-smoked cigaret.

"You mean jail?" asked Carruthers.

"The very same. I was just trying to fool Sherlock Holmes here."

Dale smiled a sickly smile. Tex led the way up-stairs, and into the room where Fitzpatrick, bound securely, was stretched flat on the floor. Dale was ludicrously ill at ease. His eyes refused to meet the stony gaze of the man who had been the law and the prophets to him for years.

Tex inspected the fussed officer of the law with a grin on his face.

"Constabule, I'm not so darn confident, someway, in the honesty of your intentions. In fact, I am frankly scared stiff that your natural kindness of heart may hamper you in your official duties. I'm going to overthrow the law this once and put a guard of my own around the jailhouse. What do you think, Jack?"

"Good idea," agreed Jack.

"Now listen here!" blustered Dale, "you can't——"

"I know we can't, but we're going to. *Sabe*, brother?"

Dale's eyes fell before the level regard of the tall flyer, whose purpose was very apparent beneath the gentle drawl. The marshal's world was topsyturvy that night; his chief a bound prisoner, Weston dead, a confession from Weston that included he did not know how much—and the inherent weakness of the man capitulated to MacDowell.

Tex untied Fitzpatrick's feet and helped him up. He drew his Colt and spun it in his hand.

"Now, Fitzpatrick, just a little word. Naturally what you have tried to do to me hasn't caused me to consider you any friend of mine. So walk just where and how I tell you to, or I'll shoot you like the rattlesnake you are!"

No one could have looked at Tex and doubted his sincerity. Fitzpatrick walked slowly out the door. Tex walked behind him down the hall, Dale and Carruthers bringing up the rear.

When they got down to the street, Tex turned to Dale.

"Lead the way to your hoosegow, Dale," he said.

Dale led them to a small building behind the Mexican restaurant. The windows were barred, and the interior contained two cells, a hallway in front of them containing a table and a chair. Each cell had a cot and two blankets. Dale, after lighting a small kerosene lamp, opened one cell. As soon as the barred door swung open he shrank back against the wall, as if mortally afraid to get near the bound Fitzpatrick.

The smuggler walked in slowly. Tex himself loosened his hands, and clanged the door shut. Fitzpatrick sat down on the bed. His burly form assumed its wonted position, hands resting motionless on his knees. His eyes followed MacDowell continually. Carruthers watched him with curious repulsion. He shivered at the quiescent venom and menace that seemed to compose the aura of Dave Fitzpatrick.

After the marshal had locked the cell door Tex held out his hand.

"Mind giving me the key, Dale?" he inquired softly.

"Yes, I do!" stated Dale, stealing a quick look at Fitzpatrick for approval. "What right have you——"

"None, probably," returned Tex easily. "But here's what you're going to do. If Carruthers don't mind, he'll go up and get a hard-boiled sergeant that has been waiting for possible happenings up in my room at the hotel. Then you're going to swear that sergeant in as one of your assistants, deputies, posse-members or whatever you call 'em. In fact, he's going to be your chief assistant. And he's going to take charge of the keys and this prisoner. Probably it isn't strictly legal, but this town and this night aren't what you might call examples of legal procedure."

"I'll run down after Correll now," said Carruthers, and departed on his errand.

"Sheriff, I shouldn't be surprized if you rather hope that Stearns don't get caught. How about it?"

"Wh—what do you mean?" stammered the marshal, his eyes once more stealing toward Fitzpatrick.

The ghost of an unpleasant smile twisted the wide, thin gash that was Fitzpatrick's mouth.

"Well, of course Mr. Weston's confession, so to speak, didn't include you but it doesn't take many elaborate mental processes to connect you up with Fitzpatrick's operations in Ausman," Tex answered judicially. "Thoroughness appears to be one of your prisoner's chief assets in his business."

The sheriff was squirming like an eel. He didn't know just where he stood with the soft-spoken pilot who was so surprizingly delegating to himself much authority.

"Now if Stearns should be caught he might talk, and if he talked you might be in an—er—embarrassing position, eh, Sherlock?" proceeded Tex mercilessly.

Dale's fleshy, gross face was beaded with sweat, and he licked his thick lips with a tongue that was almost as dry as they were.

"However, maybe I can persuade you to rout out the telegraph operator and send wires to the county sheriff, and the chiefs of police in Victoria, Corpus Christi, and some other near-by points. Stearns won't have a chance to get away by railroad, and I doubt whether he knows enough about boats to risk them—he wouldn't have gone through the center of town anyway, having lost the protection of his benefactor here."

Tex looked at Fitzpatrick as he finished speaking, meeting the stony glare of his enemy imperturbably.

"Fitzpatrick, a man licked in a square fight deserves only respect and sympathy, But so help me, if there's any varieties of ways to rub it in that I don't find for your special benefit, tell me about it."

Footsteps came to the ears of the three waiting men, and in a moment Carruthers entered, with Correll's huge form looming up behind him. The grizzled sergeant's face wore a smile that split it from ear to ear as he surveyed Fitzpatrick leisurely.

"Well, well, old scout, how does she feel?" he chuckled. "Lieutenant, it must 'a' been a large evening for you."

"Sizeable, Correll, sizeable," grinned Tex. "Did Carruthers tell you that you were going to be a deputy marshal, or whatever they call the town policeman, for the night?"

"He did. I'm breakin' in on a good prisoner, too," returned Correll.

"All kidding aside, though, you may be a little up against it, at that. I don't know just how the men that have been working for this double-cross artist here feel toward him. I imagine that they haven't any personal affection for him, and that most of them will be tickled to death to see him out of the way. But there's just a chance that there may be a rescue party formed. I'll be back here as soon as the constable and I send off a few wires about this Stearns, and a few more to Dad and the Texas Rangers and a few more places. Two guns may be better than one."

"We'll be ready," stated Correll.

"No reason why I can't hang around, is there?" inquired Jack.

"None at all. Thought you might be a little tired. I believe I'll leave Weston's last statement with you, Jack. Some one might take a notion to roll me for it, even under the protection of the law."

He handed Jack the closely written pages that constituted a fragmentary but convincing tale of Fitzpatrick's ten-year conquest of Ausman.

"Does that confession give Fitzpatrick ——, lieutenant?" asked the sergeant eagerly.

Fitzpatrick himself deigned to turn his head a trifle and look at Tex as he answered slowly:

"Enough. It's plenty to rope and hog-tie him, as far as that's concerned. I guess all Weston knew we know, now, and it'll be a good start for more. Jack told you about the frame they had ready and waiting for me to step into, didn't he?"

Correll nodded, his face dark and forbidding as he looked at Fitzpatrick.

"I'm liable to remember it if there's any funny work, too," he said, his eyes boring into the opaque ones that refused to allow a glimmer of expression to show in them.

"I'm somewhat hazy, as I said before,

about the propriety of the Air Service becoming the law in Ausman, but swear him in, Sherlock," said Tex.

For a moment it seemed as if Dale was about to balk again. It did not take him long to decide that the odds were all against him, however, and in a moment Sergeant Correll was a full-fledged deputy, and a statement in writing to that effect, signed with a shaky "Vancouver B. Dale, peace officer, Ausman, Texas," was in his hands to back up his claim should any one doubt his authority.

"I'll be back after the police force and I send some telegrams," Tex said as he opened the door.

Dale followed him out slowly. An hour sufficed to rout out the maiden lady who acted as ticket agent and telegraph operator for Ausman, convince her of the importance of the occasion and despatch many messages. After lending his official presence to this laudable, though unpleasant duty, Dale departed thankfully. It may be added that he departed with a completeness that was almost astounding in an officer of the law with an important criminal at large and another one in his toils. Ausman never saw him more.

XV

"I JUST happened to think of it. I think we'd better call around early and see her. She sure is a game little girl, isn't she?"

It was MacDowell speaking. He was seated on the floor of the little jail, his back against the wall. He showed no marks of an all-night vigil or of the fast succession of events—some of them distinctly energetic from a physical as well as a mental standpoint—of the previous evening.

"You're right, Tex. I shouldn't be surprized if it was going to be up to us to help her over some of the hard places in the next few days. There's really nobody much here—a couple of women, probably, but no one to take the work off her shoulders."

Carruthers, slumped down in the chair, showed the marks of sleeplessness plainly. His handsome face was rather drawn, and his eyes had deep black rings around them. His curly hair was in a remarkably unkempt condition.

"Corinne has had more hard luck than comes to most girls," resumed Jack, warming up to his favorite topic. "It was hard enough for a girl like her to be cooped up in a place like this, and then to find that her father was a Fitzpatrick crook——"

He glanced through the bars at the heavy, motionless figure of the ex-border monarch. Fitzpatrick, fully dressed, was stretched on the bed. It was impossible to tell whether he was asleep or not.

"I feel a lot of sympathy for the old man, though, at that," said Tex. "Fitzpatrick hits below the belt, and it's no disgrace to go down under that kind of fighting."

He got to his feet leisurely and blew out the flickering oil lamp.

"Methinks the beams of the early morn will be enough until the trusty sergeant arrives," he remarked as he resumed his restful posture on the floor.

"Said beams of the early morn are welcome," Carruthers assured him, stifling a yawn.

They had dispatched Correll to get some sleep, so that he could guard Fitzpatrick during the day. The slight break in legal procedure by which the deputy slept while total outsiders guarded the jail did not bother them. It was the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and twenty, but in the last few hours such things as law, courts, and divers other civilized institutions had receded into the background.

"I can't help but feel as though I was mixed up in Daddy George's death, somehow," said Tex slowly, his face very serious as he gazed straight ahead of him.

It was the first time he had mentioned it, although it had been in his mind off and on ever since the events of the evening before.

"I can understand how you feel, but if it was your fault I'm a shavetail in the Quartermaster Corps," declared Jack. "Of course you helped him discover the blank cartridges, but he might have done that anyway. And there's no guarantee that his change to real bullets was responsible for his death, although I admit that probably it's the truth. But there's no way under heaven you could have figured it, Tex."

"I know—with our information as sketchy and ill-founded as it was, I believe we did the only possible thing, but——"

"Perhaps it's better the old man died, anyhow, Tex. There wouldn't have been much left in life for him after this blew over."

"Maybe not."

"Corinne is going to need a brotherly lift—" Jack said, in an effort to change the subject. Tex interrupted him.

"All lifts labeled brotherly I'll look out for," he said with a quizzical grin. "I wonder how she's going to be fixed on money? Didn't you say she didn't have any relatives or close friends?"

"Not a one. She's been marooned here, except for a couple of years at school, ever since she's been old enough to make any friends. She's only twenty."

"Well, if she'll let us I guess maybe we can fix her up a little some way."

They fell silent, each man apparently immersed in his thoughts. Jack was thinking of the girl. Tex was thinking for the hundredth time of what the events of the preceding night meant to him. There were many ramifications: he was under the impression that Fitzpatrick was a citizen of Mexico and not of the United States, for one, and he was not at all sure of just what the possibilities of the situation were. Especially the high-and-mighty arrest.

Mr. Weston's confession did not clear up the cloud that hung over him on the charge of carrying opium, but it helped a great deal as a starting point to work from. It was about a fifty-fifty chance that both court martial and civilian jury would clear him, now that Fitzpatrick was not in much of a position to pull wires and keep the anti-MacDowell pot boiling up around San Antonio. If by any chance his father, to whom he had dispatched a long wire the night before, had unearthed anything down at McMullen, chances for an acquittal that would clear his name completely were excellent.

He wondered how long it would be before the county sheriff arrived from Acacia. Unless he was badly mistaken, the sheriff would have a Texas ranger to help him after MacDowell senior arrived, which Tex was sure he would. In that case, the search for Blackie Stearns would be stimulated considerably. The pilot wondered who Stearns was.

"Must be a bad egg," he reflected with darkening face as he thought of the bloody work of Stearns' hand and Fitzpatrick's mind.

Mr. Weston's death was bad enough, but somehow the thought of gentle, white-bearded old Daddy George stretched on the floor of the office, shot to death as an innocent pawn in a terrible game, affected Tex as it had every one else, even Searles. MacDowell's natural elation at the lightening of the clouds around him was strongly tinged with bitter regret at the recollections that must always accompany the thought of Ausman.

The sun was well up when Correll arrived to relieve the two flyers. The sergeant was in fine fettle, and apparently really looked forward to a day of association with Dave Fitzpatrick.

"We'll reminisce about the border," he remarked with a grin. "We got a lot of mutual acquaintances, ain't we, Fitz?"

Fitz didn't answer.

"How about food?" inquired Correll just before the others left.

"Buy him his meals at the spig refreshery," said Tex, giving the sergeant some money. "May warm him up a little. He hasn't been very sociable up to now. *Adios;* we'll probably be dropping by again before long."

They repaired to the hotel, drawing deep breaths of the cool morning air as they walked the short distance. The sun had a touch of red through the thin mist—it was going to be a blistering day.

"Well, after pruning the foliage and scrubbing up a bit, I'll sure be in shape to surround a couple of healthy eggs," remarked Tex as they ascended the veranda steps.

"I've got some whiskers to mow, likewise. Match you to see who's first in the so-called bathroom," returned Carruthers.

They stopped at the door, drew out coins, and matched. Jack won. Eventually Tex succeeded in compromising to the extent that he could bathe while Jack shaved, in order to accelerate breakfast.

The shave, followed by a bath—cold of necessity—in the superannuated tin tub, woke up Carruthers and increased MacDowell's desire for breakfast. Clean clothes from the skin out and a good breakfast—the one meal of the day that was above reproach in Mr. and Mrs. Smith's hostelry—completed the rehabilitation of the flyers. At nine o'clock they set out for the Weston home.

The little white-haired housekeeper, her thin face showing signs of copious weeping, answered the door. The flyers told her they would wait out on the porch, and seated themselves on the lounge where they had talked with Corinne so often.

Soon she came out, dressed in a simple frock. Although her eyes showed dark circles and her lips quivered a bit as she greeted them she seemed only a little more subdued and serious than usual.

"Miss Corinne—" began Tex, when she interrupted him.

"Please don't add the 'miss'," she said with a pathetic little smile that hinted at her great need for friendship.

"All right, Corinne," said Tex. "There's just one thing we wanted to say this morning. Neither Jack nor I are much on excess talk along sentimental lines, but we thought —we hoped—that it might make things a little easier for you if you knew that both of us are just hoping that we can show you a little bit of our sympathy by doing things for you. If it isn't too presumptuous to ask you to look at us as your big brothers, and if you'll just let us take everything off your shoulders, we'll be happy as clams. There's never going to be a time or a circumstance that will alter our desire to do all we can for our nervy little newly adopted sister."

"And that goes the limit, too, Corinne," interjected Carruthers, his heart in his eyes as he looked at her. "You've got those friends and relatives we talked about last night, with a couple of hired men and caretakers thrown in for good measure, on your front porch right now!"

The girl's hand touched the flyer's for a moment in silent thanks. Her eyes, tear-filled in spite of herself, rose to meet MacDowell's.

"You don't—you can't know—somehow, thinking of father——"

Her self-control gave way, and she bowed her head in her arm. The broken arm, in a sling, lent an additional touch of pathos to the bowed head with its crown of glinting auburn hair.

"Corinne, of course there is really nothing one can say, I don't suppose," came MacDowell's voice gently, "but I'm sure that after the first shock of your grief and your disillusion have passed that you'll see things more clearly than you do now, perhaps. If you'll pardon a rather personal reference, I've sort of knocked around quite a lot, and I've learned one thing, I think—from what people have often thought of me as well as the reverse—and that is that there is seldom a broken life or a convict or a suicide that does not come as the result of happenings that would ofttimes break the very men and women who are the first to condemn.

"Your father stole money to try to save your mother's life. For years he has gone through hell, we all know, and I am sure that the only reason that he spent these weary years in Ausman was for your sake. And at the end he broke his own heart by deliberately disillusioning you to try and right the wrong he felt he'd done to an able-bodied man like me who doesn't amount to much anyway. Whether or not your father had been there, Fitzpatrick would have tried to get me. Whatever else he may have been forced to do, Mr. Weston was a loving father above all, and at the last a self-sacrificing man who did all he could without hope of reward."

Specious although some of his words might have been, they were effective. It was an older, more mature Tex MacDowell whose softly slurred words came with quiet sympathy and understanding to the pitifully friendless girl. The tears came faster, but they were the tears that relieve and not intensify the pangs of sorrow.

Tex tactfully, little by little, drew the subject away from Mr. Weston.

Finally Corinne raised her head and smiled.

"I've been awfully silly, and I hope you'll excuse me, both of you," she said. "Both my—my brothers," she added shyly.

Before they left the flyers had taken full responsibility for funeral arrangements for Daddy George and Mr. Weston. They touched on Mr. Weston's affairs. None of the three had any idea as to what part, if any, of the store or its contents belonged to him.

Tex strolled down the walk slowly. He seized the opportunity when Carruthers asked for a drink.

Jack drank his water, and then took his hat. Corinne held out her hand to him in farewell, but for some reason her eyes wavered and fell.

"Corinne, please don't worry—about anything. What Tex said goes—every bit of it—and as far as I'm concerned it goes—well, what I mean is that it doesn't stop when all this is over, and—and—oh, shoot, I can't say it now but I'm going to some day, and—well, just don't worry, that's all!"

"Of all the —— unmitigated, blithering asses!" groaned Jack as he walked swiftly toward MacDowell. "Good Lord, if ever a man——"

"Were you bound down-town to kill somebody or merely rehearsing a stinging denunciation of prohibition?" grinned Tex.

"What do you mean?" inquired Jack, slowing up his rate of progress down the road.

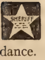
"Your face read 'make it or bust' and your eye sure looked mean. Likewise, you were shaking a wicked pair of feet and pumping a mean pair of arms," Tex told him.

"Oh, I put my foot in it and was bawling myself out," admitted Carruthers sheepishly.

"I gathered that from the piercing pink of your cheeks. Cheer up, Jack. Unless all signs fail, you're soon going to put your foot in it even deeper!"

It may be gathered that Tex himself was not contemplating matrimony.

XVI



THE sun-drenched field sent up shivery, ever-changing heat-waves that shimmered in blinding abundance. The two ships, staked down and covered, were at one end, and Tex walked slowly toward them. It was midafternoon, but he did not feel the need of sleep. He had walked out to make sure that the planes had not been tampered with. At six o'clock the evening train was due. If his wire had caught MacDowell senior at home he might be in on that train—the only incoming train of the day in Ausman.

Sheriff Smithers from Acacia had arrived at noon, *via* his official tin lizzie. He proved to be a small, mean-looking man who looked and acted like bad medicine to any one he was after. He had found Tex and Correll at the jail, and waxed blasphemous as he read the authority Dale had given Correll.

"Where the —— is Dale?" he demanded.

"Haven't seen him since last night," Tex returned.

"What's he been doing about rounding up this murderer?"

"Nothing that I know of, and I shouldn't be surprized if the sergeant here represented the law as far as Ausman is concerned."

"I shouldn't either," admitted Smithers. "This Ausman has always been queer—I've been held down in various ways, and of late never got no complaints. Who's the prisoner?"

"Name of Dave Fitzpatrick," stated Tex.

"Not that *hombre* from the border?"

The sheriff talked in staccato phrases and gave the impression that he was operating on Tex with the third degree.

"The same," replied Tex, negligently rolling a cigaret.

"What for?"

"Read this and see. It's a confession from one of the murdered men, signed and witnessed before he died."

The sheriff grabbed the precious pieces of paper and started to read rapidly. In a moment he looked up at Tex, and pushed his black felt hat lower over his eyebrows.

"MacDowell your name?" he asked.

Tex nodded.

"MacDowell, MacDowell. Let's see—say, are you the man that was caught smuggling opium up to Donovan Field?"

"Right."

"What the —— are you doing down here?"

"None of your —— business, officially," returned Tex, who did not like the tone which the sheriff used.

"Don't be too sure of that," returned the unruffled sheriff. "Even if you are in the Army."

"Oh, I'm sure enough, but if you just want to know personally there are a couple of ships out here. One cracked up and I'm down, with the sergeant and another pilot, to bring it back. Satisfy you?"

"No. But then, it doesn't matter."

The sheriff finished reading Weston's confession, and then handed it back to Tex. Tex and Correll between them told him the story of succeeding events, and of their suspicions of Vancouver B. Dale.

Smithers, his dark face frowning viciously, chewed rapidly on a long stogie.

"Big stuff here. In view of the circumstances, I'd better phone up to Acacia for a big posse. Did you wire any other places?"

"Plenty," Tex answered, and named them over.

The sheriff nodded approvingly.

"I'll send some more, and include Dale in 'em," he announced. "I'll send Fitzpatrick back to Acacia. We got a jail there'll hold him. I've got two deputies outside. They'll take him back, lock him up, and boost along a big posse. I'll stay here and get busy, telegraph and telephone. May scare up a few men here."

Tex grinned as he inspected the ships

leisurely and thought of Smithers. He had had no qualms whatever about handing Fitzpatrick into his charge. Smithers was nasty in his attitude, but he was every inch efficient. The town had been buzzing since his arrival, and undoubtedly many posses were scouring the surrounding country right then for Stearns. Word had been flashed far and wide already. Undoubtedly newspaper extras in San Antonio, Dallas, Houston and El Paso were screaming the news of the double murder. If the information regarding Dave Fitzpatrick had been included, it would have been an honest-to-goodness sensation, reflected Tex.

The ship he and Carruthers had flown was in excellent shape, even to gas and oil. The radiator had not been filled, but there was still some water in it from the trip down. Tex almost decided to take a flight among the fleecy white clouds that marched slowly from the Gulf in never ending rows of snowy white.

The wrecked ship was just as it had been left. Tex eased himself down to the ground and lay beneath a wing. The hum of a thousand insects sounded drowsily in his ears. He was forced to light a cigaret to keep the gnats from being bothersome—had it not been for that he would probably have dozed off into slumber.

He strove to think of anything he had left undone—there was nothing but looking over Mr. Weston's papers, and he wanted his father there for that. He had wired MacDowell, senior, not from any particular need of him, but only because he was sure the old man would be tickled to death to be in the middle of things—and undoubtedly would bring along with him a ranger or some other representative of the law that could take command and actually make things move toward the finding of the murderer of Daddy George and Mr. Weston. He had not known just how much the county sheriff would amount to in so important a case.

His thoughts grew more vague, and he drifted off into a blissful state of half-sleep and half-wakefulness that speedily grew into sound sleep. How long he had slept he did not know, but he was awakened by a rude shaking. He awakened to look into the barrel of a perfectly good-looking gun. The owner thereof possessed a sullen-looking face that was positively repulsive now—a two-day stubble of black beard, bloodshot eyes and mouth that was twisted into a perpetual snarl from the strain of the last twenty-four hours.

"Get up and get busy," directed the man with the gun. "Quick, —— it!"

Tex rolled out from under the wing and sat up.

"What do you want, money?" he inquired easily.

"No. You and me are goin' for a ride over the border, and if you value a whole hide you'll commence movin' right now."

Tex stood up and began to remove the propeller cover with apparent speed but actual slowness. His mind was casting around eagerly. In all probability this was Stearns—what was the best method of handling him, or trying to? A bluff about the ship not working would probably be effective, although risky.

The pilot tingled with the fierce elation that filled him. For days he had been keenly watchful, playing a dangerous game with all his might and with every realization of its importance. Now that was over, and the deliberate playing for high stakes, at great risk, which was the MacDowell habit, was the only thought he had now. Somehow or other he would gamble his all against Stearns, on the chance of getting the upper hand of the man who was holding a gun on him now.

"I don't see yet how you're going to make me carry you over the border," remarked Tex as he finally slipped off the propeller cover and started on the motor cover.

The dark face grew darker. Stearns was in no mood to be balked.

"You don't, eh?" He patted the gun meaningly. "I guess it won't hurt me none to have another man added to the score," he stated.

The rather debonair, sullenly handsome rider of a day before had disappeared—apparently Stearns had roved around the entire night, because his face was cut and scratched, his clothing slightly torn, and his eyes and face showed the effect of sleeplessness and nervous tension.

Tex hesitated for a moment—should he take a chance on what he was going to say next, for the sake of a plan that had leaped into his mind? In a flash he had made his decision, and his words came casually as he folded the engine cover.

"After we get in the air, what are you going to do?" he queried. "If I take a notion to fly where I want to, and you shoot me, you might just as well point the gun against your own head—you'll come down a —— of a lot faster than you went up, with me a goner."

Stearns' face was horrible for a moment. He had almost given up hope when he had spotted the figure of a man near the ship, from some distance off. His plan for an airplane ride, providing the man was a pilot, had leaped into his mind with heartening possibilities. MacDowell's last words dashed his hopes for a moment, and the awful temper that was the source of his present predicament convulsed the dark face with all-consuming wrath. Tex was never nearer death than he was for the space of a few seconds, while Stearns' finger itched on the trigger of his gun.

Some saving remnant of self control, induced by the thought that his only hope of escape lay in the tall, careless pilot before him, kept Stearns from pulling the trigger. Tex had won his first point. The reddened eyes of the rider rested on the plane, and as they did a light of fierce triumph leaped into them.

"I might be committing suicide to shoot you, mister," he sneered, "but there's other ways. I figure you wouldn't like to have an eye gouged out, now, would you?"

He worked his thumb with horrible meaning.

"So any time you get gay, just remember I'll be leanin' forward from the back seat there, and out comes an eye at the first sign of any o' your tricks. Savvy?"

MacDowell's eyes rested on the fifteen inch cowling that separated back and front cockpits.

"I guess you've got me," he admitted. Strangely, though, he did not seem disappointed.

"Come on, get busy here and don't talk so much!" snapped Stearns, and Tex obeyed.

The rider's eyes roved around nervously. The nearest shack was a half-mile away. The big barn was deserted. Not a sign of human life except an automobile passing along the pike a quarter of a mile or more away was in sight to worry him, and he relaxed somewhat.

"You're Stearns, aren't you?" inquired Tex as he busily pulled stakes and cut the knots in the stake-ropes.

"Ye-ah. You're MacDowell, ain't you?"

"Right. By the way, now that you've got me roped, there's no sense of being hard. Might as well be as pleasant as possible under the circumstances, both of us. If I was in your fix and had no smokes, I'd sure like one right now. How about it?"

The bold, bloodshot black eyes lit up eagerly. Had it not been that on either hand of Stearns Tex could see in his imagination the forms of Daddy George and Mr. Weston, he might have had it in his heart to pity his captor.

He held out tobacco and papers. Stearns took them gingerly, his gun ever ready.

"Wait a minute till I shake you down," he ordered.

With gun pressed against the flyer he quickly searched him, and then stood him with his hands up while he examined the cockpits quickly for any signs of a weapon. Satisfied, he turned back again.

"All right, *hombre*, hustle," he ordered, and in a moment more was dragging in soul-satisfying lungfuls of smoke.

Tex was not the man he had been in the previous days—every chance a carefully calculated one, one idea uppermost and his personal desires secondary. The pilot was actually hoping that no one would appear on the scene to spoil his plan. He yearned to pit himself against the man who had been a part of the vicious conspiracy against him, and the murderer of two old men besides. The flyer's chances were not more than one in five, but he leaped at the opportunity, slight though it was and horrible as the consequences would be to him if he failed.

Blocks were already under the wheels. He climbed into the cockpit and turned on the gas. Then he pumped up the air pressure to three pounds and primed the cylinders with the little priming-pump on the dashboard. This done, he climbed out again and twisted the propeller several times to suck additional gas into the engine.

Stearns watched him carefully as he worked. The murderer had taken the proffer of cigarets as a capitulation. He felt that Tex was afraid of him now; that the unsolicited smoke was an effort to dissipate Stearns' anger and resentment. The outlaw puffed contentedly at his second cigaret.

Tex climbed back in the cockpit, turned on the starting-switch and whirled the self-starter rapidly. The booster-magneto failed to start the motor that time, but the second time it hit, thanks to the hot sun that had kept the sturdy hundred and eighty horsepower engine warm.

As the roar of the motor filled the air Stearns became nervous for two reasons. One was that the noise might draw onlookers, and the other, and momentarily more important one, was the inevitable excitement and fear of the landsman at the thought of a trip up into a most unsubstantial sky in a frail-looking linen-and-wood frame for a most disturbingly big and noisy motor.

Stearns came close to the ship, leaning against the wind of the propeller, and bellowed into MacDowell's ear—

"We're startin' right now, hear?"

Tex cut the warming motor to idling as he said:

"She's got to warm up a little more or she's liable to cut. For ——'s sake don't try to butt in on flying—you don't know a —— thing about it and you'll just kill the both of us if you don't lay off. She'll be ready in about a minute now—climb in and I'll strap you."

Stearns' face grew ugly for a moment, but he could not argue the matter. With his gun pointed at Tex he climbed in slowly and sank into the seat. It was another ticklish moment for Tex MacDowell's scheme as he fastened the huge snap-buckle on the wide canvas belt around Stearns. The gun was pressed tight against him as he did it.

"Keep your feet flat on the floor and your hands off everything, do you understand?" said Tex, raising his voice only slightly, for the motor was still idling.

"Except you," retorted Stearns.

Tex grinned.

"I'm not forgetting that," he said.

He was leaning over from the front cockpit. He did not betray the fact that his plan was hanging on the narrow edge of failure if Stearns should realize but one thing—somehow it seemed to the pilot that the outlaw must think of it, but his voice was quiet and his air almost careless as he pointed out the throttle, on the left hand side, the switch, on the right, and the rudder as things especially to be avoided by an ignorant passenger. The stick had not been put in since it was removed to carry Corinne.

"You can send us into the ground by touching any one of them," Tex told him. "Well, I guess we can start as soon as I pull the blocks."

He turned up the motor for a moment. Temperature was only 65 Centigrade, but that would do in a pinch. It ran smoothly, so he cut the throttle, crawled beneath the wings and pulled the crude blocks Correll had fashioned.

He saw a car turn into the side-road that led to the field. Another one was rolling along the main pike. Far across the flat fields, with the shacks dotting them at intervals, a few tiny figures could be seen where Mexicans were at work. It was quiet, peaceful, lazily rural and summery. That gun-barrel peeping at him from the back cockpit was very close and very remindful, however.

He was going to be compelled to fly without helmet or goggles, as was Stearns. However, there were big isinglass windshields on the sturdy Jenny, and the speed would not be so tremendous nor the propeller blast so powerful as in a D. H. By hunching well down behind the windshield it would not be hard to fly for the few moments that would decide one of two things: whether only Blackie Stearns would lose, or whether they both would. Not until they actually got well off the ground would it be certain that he would have an opportunity to try his scheme.

He did not hurry as he lounged around the wing and climbed in. He was more deliberate than usual, in fact. Stearns, shaking slightly but with no hint of weakness in his face, beckoned Tex with the gun as the flyer started to throw his leg over the cowl. Not by the slightest sign did Tex betray the fact that it would have meant failure to all his plans if Stearns had waited another two seconds to indicate to the pilot that he wanted to say something.

"If you still want to have a pair o' eyes, fly south and don't stop and don't do nothin' but get there!" Stearns said as Tex leaned toward him.

Tex nodded once more, his eyes resting briefly on the unshaven, forbidding face so close to his own. Then he slid into the front cockpit, buckled his belt swiftly, and shoved on the throttle without an instant's delay. He was atingle with reckless delight as they sped across the ground and finally swept upward. He had gambled heavily, and so far the game was a winning one for him.

He flew straight south, climbing as fast as he dared. The westering sun was very close to the horizon—he must have slept a couple of hours. It was very bumpy—

every time plowed land was beneath them the ship would rush upward, and the occasional damp places always flopped them earthward from ten to twenty feet, as alternate currents of hot air, rushing upward, and cold currents coming down, caught the ship.

The motor was turning sixteen hundred, and getting hot. There was not a great deal of water in the radiator, he knew. Oil and air pressures were exactly right, though.

At a thousand feet he decided to take his chance. He looked back at Stearns, who was crouching down in his seat to save his eyes. MacDowell's own eyes were watery—he put up a hand to shield them as he looked back. No thought of pity for the man behind him undermined his determination. Had he been inclined that way, the tableau in the office that was etched on his memory would have decided him.

He banked so gradually that Stearns did not realize what he was doing until the ship had traveled a considerable distance back toward Ausman. MacDowell waited for the moment when Stearns would look around and see the waters of the Gulf stretching to his right instead of the left. What would he do—which one of two things? The next few seconds would determine whether Tex himself lived or died—for the murderer of Daddy George and Mr. Weston there was no hope in any event.

They were twelve hundred feet high now, and Tex, turned in his seat, nosed down gradually. He noted subconsciously that the train was approaching the depot, three miles away from where they were flying. The glowing gray eyes watched Stearns like a hawk.

The rider looked up and his gaze met MacDowell's steady regard. He guarded his eyes with his hand as he straightened up to look over the side of the cockpit. The wires were screaming with the speed, as with motor wide open the ship roared toward the ground.

For a moment the outlaw peered down steadily, then his eyes swept the Gulf—on his right instead of his left. The dark, forbidding face contorted with fury, and the big body lunged forward, a long arm stretched toward Tex.

The pilot was bent forward as far as possible. Stearns' arm did not reach within a foot of him. The buckled belt held him tight to the low seat—something that the landsman had not figured on.

It was the supreme moment for Tex. Would the raging Stearns use his gun in the heat of his wrath, or would he unbuckle his belt to reach him? Stearns struggled wildly for a moment, his eyes almost blinded by the terrific speed. Then Tex saw his head drop. In a second Stearns lunged for him, the belt buckle unsnapped.

Like a flash Tex jerked back on the stick and jammed on left rudder. The ship swooped up and over on its back in a fast Immelman turn. The hand clutched at him for a second, and was gone. Tex was low—less than a thousand feet, but he pushed forward on the stick and neutralized his rudder, holding the ship on its back for a moment. Then he jerked back on the stick and swooped downward and right side up again, four hundred feet from the ground.

The back cockpit was empty.

XVII

J CARRUTHERS, after a brief nap, had spent the afternoon with Corinne. The doctor had attended to securing an undertaker from Acacia, and the bodies of Mr. Weston and Daddy George, encased in simple coffins, were in the parlor of the Weston home. Corinne and Jack had escaped from the depressing influence of the silent house by taking a long walk.

As six o'clock approached Jack, who knew that Tex half-expected his father on the train, suggested to Corinne that they both go to the depot. Tex would be there, and they could all meet MacDowell senior. He had told her of MacDowell's idea that they have his father attend to straightening up the business affairs of Mr. Weston, and she had thankfully accepted. It would not be wise for either of the flyers to do it—Tex by reason of his conspicuous and unsavory notoriety, and Carruthers for still other reasons which he did not mention.

As the train whistled for the crossing a mile away Carruthers turned with a surprized exclamation.

"That sounds like a ship!"

"It is—see, there it is!" Corinne replied, pointing to the plane that was just rising above the houses and trees of Ausman.

"That's funny. I don't see why Tex is going up now, unless he wanted to escort his father in by airplane. If that was his idea, he's a little late."

The knot of hangers-on around the station—a quite considerable number, for Ausman was no different from other Southern towns in its habit of turning out to see the train come in—watched the ship interestedly.

The incoming train got little attention as everybody watched the plane turn back toward town. The train drew to a stop and the first of the passengers got off. Carruthers was starting forward to look for Mr. MacDowell when a scream from Corinne and loud exclamations from many others made him turn around.

The ship was just going on its back, and in speechless horror the onlookers saw the unmistakable body of a man fall out and come hurtling earthward. One arm around the half-fainting Corinne, Carruthers waited in dumb agony. Then a great shout came from his lips and he did a crazy dance around the platform.

"The ship came level—it isn't Tex!" he whooped in wild abandon of joy. Corinne could not believe her ears.

"I don't know what the deal is, but there's a pilot in that ship—look!" said Carruthers above the jostling, excited mob of people that surrounded them.

A huge, black-sombreroed figure threw a half dozen people aside and grabbed Carruthers by the shoulder.

"Are you Jack Carruthers?"

The full, lined face was drawn and working, and beneath the gray mustache the mouth was a thin line. Carruthers looked up at the huge, gray-headed man with a radiant grin.

"I am, and you're Mr. MacDowell. Don't worry—that was not Tex. See, the ship is all right and is coming down to land."

"Sure?" demanded the old ranchman, beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Absolutely. Let's get out there and see what happened. I'm as much in the dark as you are."

The big ranchman drew a breath of relief. His eyes regained their customary twinkle and his mouth the whimsical crook that was so much like his son's expression.

"This is Miss Weston, Mr. MacDowell," said Carruthers.

Mr. MacDowell took her hand in both of his, and patted it gently.

"I'm glad to know you, Miss Weston," he said with more gentleness than many of his acquaintances would have believed he possessed.

He turned and looked over the heads of the people on the platform, who were jabbering excitedly. Many of them had started in autos and on foot for the field. The airplane was out of sight now—it had evidently landed.

"Oh, Cary! Come on—you, too, Corwin," boomed his great voice, and two men picked up grips and started toward them.

"I've got the town jitney engaged out here—or rather our private jitney. I hope he hasn't run away," Jack told Mr. MacDowell as they waited for the other two men.

Young Smith, his jaws working at blinding speed, was awaiting them. Mr. MacDowell eased himself into the front seat and piled the baggage in around him. The two civilians and Corinne got in the back, and Jack hung on the running board.

"Drive easy to save Miss Weston's arm," Jack ordered.

"Excuse me—this is Captain Cary of the Texas Rangers and Mr. Corwin, of the Consolidated Press up in San Antone—Miss Weston and Lieutenant Carruthers," said Mr. MacDowell.

The ranger was a hatchet-faced, keen-eyed man with the deep tan of the old-timer in Texas. He looked to be about forty years old. He was thin and wiry and had a pronounced drawl. The newspaperman possessed a cherubic countenance decorated with immense horn spectacles.

On the way to the field Carruthers, leaving out any reference to recent events in Ausman, talked continuously to keep any of the men from asking embarrassing questions in Corinne's presence. The ranger and Mr. MacDowell would know the full story, eventually, but Jack did not want to discuss it in Corinne's hearing. It was comparatively easy to do, for every one was eager to find out details of the horrible sight they had just witnessed.

At least a hundred people, half of them tattered Mexicans, were before them. An excited throng surrounded Tex, whose head could be seen above the crowd. Jack stood up on the running board and yelled in stentorian tones. Tex caught sight of him and waved as he started toward the car.

"Hello, dad—thought you might rove in," he greeted his father, shaking hands and acknowledging introductions to Corwin and Cary.

"What happened just now?" demanded his father.

Tex told them the story briefly. The crowd had followed him over. Prominent among them was Balavo, the Mexican, whose attention was about equally divided between the story and Corinne.

There was absolute silence as the flyer, his eyes on his father most of the time, sketched the tale.

"Mr. Weston's written story of the murder of himself and Daddy George—which you don't know the details of yet, gentlemen—named Stearns and he admitted his identity to me. I guess I can clear myself on self-defense or something, anyway."

"By the mighty! I'll bet a heap it's the man that shot Bogie Bill Drumm!" exclaimed the ranger.

He and Corwin, whose round eyes were sparkling behind his glasses, told Tex of the recent murder of the showman. The ranger made off toward the next field, where the remains of Stearns lay. Tex told him that Smithers was already on the job, and that most of the posse that had come down on the train was already there, likewise. Cary, who was familiar with various specifications in the nationwide circular that had gone out describing Stearns, could not rest until he satisfied himself whether the dead man was the wanted murderer of Bogie Bill or not.

The crowd followed the ranger—rumors of his identity had already been spread about—and left the others reasonably free from curious onlookers. Mr. MacDowell, with rare tact that seemed incongruous to associate with so big and direct a personality, did not question his son regarding the double murder or what he had found out about Fitzpatrick.

"Lee, boy, you got away on this Stearns thing just now, but what in hallelujah did you run your neck in a noose like that for? That bird was liable to muss you up there."

Tex, standing with hands in the back pockets of his breeches, grinned at his gray-haired parent.

"I don't suppose you ever took a chance, did you?" he inquired.

His father looked at him severely.

"That's no excuse, you wild-eyed, totally foolish kid! I'll bet you were tickled to death at the chance!"

Tex sobered, his eyes turning to Corinne's face for a moment. He leaned over and touched her hand lightly.

"I was, dad. Stearns had it coming to him, you know."

Mr. MacDowell turned around and met the girl's eyes.

"He sure did—don't think I'm not tickled to death your father's murderer is punished, Miss Weston, and furthermore I'd 'a' done the same thing in Lee's place."

She smiled faintly—and gained a powerful ally in Roaring Bill MacDowell.

"It was the same *hombre!*" came Cary's voice, as he and Smithers hurried toward the car.

The newspaper man's eyes snapped.

"Gee, what a story," he breathed.

He was aching to get to the telegraph office. Details on the murder of Mr. Weston and the night-watchman could wait for another story—with luck he could land an extra in every city in Texas that night.

"Well, boys, we've got to thrash things out *pronto*," declared MacDowell senior. "Looks like poetic justice and all that sort of thing has been perpetrated by this scamp of a son of mine, but I guess there's a few ends to be cleaned up yet. Let's go, shall we?"

"Smithers, suppose you tend to getting Stearns' body down-town and so forth," Cary said to the county sheriff, who had been waiting silently. "Come to the hotel after supper and we'll get down to tacks."

"Suits me," barked Smithers, and made off with quick, short strides.

"Corinne, you're coming to the hotel tonight to eat," stated Carruthers from the running-board.

Tex was on the other one, and the overloaded jitney made hard going over the sandy road, now deeply rutted from the passage of many cars.

"Of course she is," stated Mr. MacDowell heartily. He surmised the friendless condition of the lovely girl—his son's wire had mentioned her.

SMITHERS, several of his deputies, the ranger, the newspaperman and the MacDowells occupied a big table at the hotel, with Carruthers and Corinne at a smaller one near the window. After dinner Jack and Corinne wandered off toward the bank of the Gulf, and Smithers, Tex, his father and Cary went into executive session. The flyer's telegram had been phoned to his father in Austin, and he had picked up Cary, an old friend, and started immediately. Corwin, a friend of Cary's, had been on the train from San Antonio, Ausman-bound.

Tex told them all that had happened, answering innumerable questions from the keen-eyed Cary and his father as he went along. He read the confession of Mr. Weston aloud. When he had finished the tale Cary turned to the ranchman and remarked dryly—

"Quite a son you got, Bill."

Mr. MacDowell shook his head sadly as he looked at the smiling Tex.

"It's an awful thing not to be able to control your children," he opined. "Well, son, this is just about going to clear up your mess at Donovan Field, I guess, without what little we've accomplished. Old Bill Trowbridge, sheriff of Hidalgo County, finally landed the soldier that had been seen chumming around with a strange Mexican, and he confessed that he got drunk on guard the night before you and Hickman left for Donovan, on liquor this spig, who was a well-dressed, classy-lookin' Mex, gave him. That's something, but we can't find hide nor hair of said spig."

"Well," said Captain Cary of the Rangers slowly, "here's what we've got, as I see it. Fitzpatrick's in jail, with a confession that's iron-clad and will be the means of getting lots more evidence, to break him. The Mexican Government will come across all right now that Obregon's in. Dave's goose is cooked. The murderer of Weston and old George Dobey has been attended to. From what your boy here says about Dale he'll talk when he's caught, and Smithers has fixed it so he sure will be. Others in this town'll tell all they know, too, and some o' that bunch that's been rounded up along the border will converse free and easy when they find old Dave's up a tree. As far as this smuggling deal of the boy here is concerned, there's no chance of anything but an acquittal—maybe dismissal of the charges without a court martial or a trial of any kind. It would be a little better from your view-point if that could be cleaned up complete by nailing whoever planted the opium, but I'm afraid we can't do that."

Smithers nodded his agreement with the ranger's summary.

"Well, Lee, for once your infernal ability to get into trouble has got you some gravy, as it were," grinned Mr. MacDowell, throwing his cigaret butt into the water below. The men were seated on the bank.

"Looks that way," admitted Tex.

NEXT morning, while the representatives of the law were very busy, Mr. MacDowell and Tex went over Mr. Weston's papers. They found a fully paid life insurance policy for twenty thousand dollars, payable to Corinne, and a bank account in a San Antonio bank of some ten thousand dollars more. They went up to the Weston home, and after a long talk with Corinne Mr. MacDowell persuaded her to accept a sizeable loan pending the settling of her father's estate. It was decided that Corinne should live in San Antonio for a while at least, and take with her the little housekeeper that had been with the Westons so long. Jack Carruthers nearly turned a handspring on the front porch when this was settled.

That afternoon came the simple funeral for Mr. Weston and Daddy George. The minister from Acacia, primed by Tex, handled it delicately and the ceremony was marred by no reference to the things that increased the grief of her father's loss to Corinne. Mr. Weston and Daddy George were laid away in a tiny grove near the old pioneer's shack.

The hotel dining-room that evening held several newspapermen in addition to the three airmen, Mr. MacDowell, Smithers and Captain Cary, and Corinne. Mr. Weston's confession had been kept a secret—all that the newspapermen knew was that there was excellent secret evidence to account for Fitzpatrick's incarceration, and the fixing of the crime of the double murder on Stearns, wanted for the death of Bogie Bill Drumm. The best news men in Texas were there. The importance of Mr. MacDowell in Texas, the sensational career of his son and the vague but widespread fame of Dave Fitzpatrick made it the story of their lives for the journalists.

There was to be one more event to give the final touch, and force the bright young men of the press into almost hysterical bursts of literary invention as they wrote their stories.

The small dining-room was buzzing as the details of the last few days were gone over for the 'steenth time. Without warning a short, bowlegged, middle-aged man appeared in the doorway. He was dressed in a faded sack suit, boots, and flannel shirt. Two guns sagged from beneath the coat.

Tex, who was sitting at the lower end of the long table, saw him first.

"Searles!" he exclaimed involuntarily, as he recognized one of the participants in the El Paso poker game which represented his first contact with Dave Fitzpatrick.

"Well, I'll be ——!" burst from Mr. MacDowell in utter surprize.

He made a move as if he was going to rise. So quickly that it seemed like a feat of magic two long guns covered the company. Searles' tanned, wrinkled face did not change, nor did the inscrutable, puckered eyes betray excitement.

"Sit down, please, and everybody put their hands on the table," said Searles.

Every one obeyed, as if in a trance. Corinne's eyes were wide and frightened.

"Gentlemen—and Miss Weston—I ain't aimin' to keep you long. I was a friend o' Daddy George Dobey's, which was killed by that skunk Stearns. I been hangin' around to settle up with Stearns myself, but this young wildcat here done it for me, I hear, and done it —— well, if you'll pardon me swearin', Miss Weston.

"Consequently, feelin' considerable happy and relieved over the original and satisfactory method invented by young MacDowell there, I figured I'd try to do him a favor that might help out a little. I'm blowin', Cary," he added, his eyes turning to the ranger.

"What I wanted to say was this—if you want the straight of that opium deal which you're hung for at present, get Manuel Veriga, that you'll find hangin' out in Juarez. He may be in Mexico City now, but he'll be back before long. He's yellow, and he planted that stuff in your ship, MacDowell. He'll tell all he knows if you catch him. Get him at the end of a gun in Juarez, and he'll sign a confession before witnesses. Snow, in San Antonio, was in the scheme too, but don't know much about it.

"That's all, only it won't be healthy for anybody to start chasin' me when I go from here. You ain't got nothin' on me, Cary, but in case you took a notion to grab me—don't. Just set here for a matter o' fifteen minutes until I make one o' these launch——"

"Don't worry, Searles," boomed Mr. MacDowell. "You ain't going to be bothered—I believe your information is straight."

"It is," stated the imperturbable Searles. "I figured you might not want to bother me."

"Been playin' any poker lately, Searles?" queried the old man with twinkling eyes.

The ghost of a smile hovered on the outlaw's lips as he looked at Tex. He shook his head slightly in humorous self-depreciation and vanished into the deepening dusk.

AN HOUR later Mr. MacDowell and Captain Cary were seated on the veranda of the Smith hostelry, smoking and talking as they gazed out across the Gulf. Jack and Corinne were sitting on the bank, in the deep shadow cast by a gnarled mesquite tree. A full moon blazed a shimmering path of pale silver across the tranquil water. Even Ausman seemed beautiful in the soft light and deep shadows that gilded or hid all that was ugly. The lights of one slowly moving vessel twinkled from afar across the water.

Tex, who had been shooting craps with the reporters, came slowly around the corner of the hotel, and walked to the edge of the bank. He did not notice either of the pairs who were watching him. He stood quietly, in his characteristic position of lounging ease, hands resting in the back pockets of his trousers.

Up on the porch Cary pulled at his pipe.

"That boy o' your has got a lot of the devil in him, hasn't he, Bill?" he queried.

"He has," agreed the old ranchman. "He's always been sort of harmlessly wild, if you get what I mean, but that don't worry me. What I do mind is his infernal habit of steppin' into holes just for the fun of gettin' out of 'em."

"At which he's a bear," stated the ranger.

Corinne was wondering what Tex was thinking about as he stood looking out across the water. She would have been surprized had she known. Recent events played a part in his thoughts, but the whimsical cast of his features was very pronounced as his level gray eyes remained fixed on the lights of the passing ship, far across the Gulf. Tex was living up to the motto which, probably unrealized by even himself, epitomized his attitude toward life, insofar as he individually was concerned—

It takes a good man to laugh at himself.

Arthur Schneider

THE MUTINY

by A. Judson Hanna

Author of "The Traveling Man," "A Dorset Man," etc.

TANSY took a sack of rice from his saddle-bags, poured a cupful of it into a saucepan, added water, and set it on the embers of our fire.

"I like rice best when it is steamed, not boiled," he said. "It won't boil on these embers, and we'll let this sit here till supper time and you'll find it tender as cheese."

I laughed.

"I thought I was the only ex-service man living who still cared for rice," I said. "Didn't your division get much of it?"

"I'll say we did! But not so much till we got up into Germany; and then *beaucoup—très beaucoup*. And the way those slum-burners used to cook it! A thick paste it was, so solid you could cut it into slices mostly. But it isn't the army I think of when I eat rice. It's something else."

Tansy and I were prospecting for silver in the Tuscarora Mountains in the northern part of Nevada. His horse had gone lame, so we were resting up for a day or two. Our camp was at the bottom of a little gulch between boulder-strewn hills with a little brook of ice-cold water running through it and abundant grass for our animals.

Having lighted his pipe from a coal which he lifted from the fire between two twigs, chop-stick fashion, Tansy puffed thoughtfully for a minute and then said:

"See here. Did I ever tell you about the mutiny on the *Melilla?* Then I'll tell you about it now because it was rice that started that mutiny. What I mean is, the crew wanted rice, and there wasn't any. The ship's officers had eaten it. So the crew thought they would start something; and they did, believe me.

"English ship, the *Melilla*, an ocean tramp, with sickness in her guts. By that I mean rotten engines. And a Chinese crew. I don't know what she brought out from Leith. I wasn't with her then. My chance came when the third officer took violently sick at Valparaiso and had to be sent ashore.

"We took on nitrates for Baltimore and went south. That was before the Panama Canal was opened—just a few weeks before. Everything tight so far. The captain was Scotch, a white-haired chap, very profane, except on Sundays when he read his Bible. First and second officers, young Englishmen, nice fellows, but quiet.

"So we would have been a silent bunch except for the passenger. Cameron his name was, or so he said. But I never knew a Cameron to carry around a Yiddish newspaper, which this man did when he came aboard. At that, you couldn't help liking him. He was jolly and clean-minded, lost money with the rest of us at poker and didn't worry over it. Good company, you'd have said, on a long trip like that.

"This Cameron had a dog, fox-terrier size, only she was dark gray, and he had her trimmed spaniel-fashion. Hair cut close all over her body except for a tuft on the tip of her tail, and ruffs around her ankles, and from her shoulders forward the hair was natural length. You've seen 'em like that. He called her 'Panama.' He said she was pedigreed and he had been offered fifteen hundred dollars for her. But the skipper couldn't believe that. He said he wouldn't give five pounds for the best dog ever littered.

"The bitch wore a collar as remarkable as herself, a broad steel band lined with soft leather and studded with spikes half an inch long, and sharp, too. On the buckle-plate was a rosette of cut glass as big around as a silver dollar. The center-piece was a blob of color. You know what a pecan nut is? Well, it was as big as that, and then some. It was a dark wine-red. I've seen rubies just that clear color.

"Around it was a circle of smaller glasses, three of white, then one of green; but they were much smaller. It was just tinsel—a pretty bauble. The weight of the ornament held it always at the lowest point of the collar, that is, under the dog's throat where it wasn't very noticeable on account of the long hair.

"Panama wasn't a dog to make friends easily. I don't mean she was surly—nothing like that—just reserved. She never fawned to be petted, the way most dogs do when they get to know you; never followed you around the ship. Even Cameron she didn't follow much; and seldom came on the bridge even when he was there. She didn't seem to like the ladder—open stairs, you know, with a steep pitch.

"Her favorite napping-place was on the raised deck in the bow over the galley where she would lie for hours at a stretch. Maybe she found it cooler there. I don't know. But she didn't seem to mind the chinks at all, and they got a lot of fun out of her on account of the way she was tailored.

"One day a group of them discovered the ornament on her collar and one fellow tried to twist the collar around where they could see it better. But Panama bared her teeth at him, and they all pushed back from her in a hurry.

"I SAID the *Melilla* had rotten engines. Well, half-way to the Magellan the old lady got pains in her insides and we shut down to doctor her up. Nothing short of a general overhauling would do the chief engineer said, and it was three days before we got going again. She ran for sixteen hours and lay down and quit. The chief was only a day patching her up this time, and we got clear of the Straits and were off Cape Virgin before we had more trouble. It seemed then as if we'd never get going again.

"After two-three day's tinkering they got the shaft to turning and we started. And then—say, you remember that hike to the Rhine? 'Fall out! Fall in! Fall out! Fall in!" Well, that was us for the next four or five days. The old lady would twist her tail for a few hours, and then rest for another half-day. Then at some unexpected minute she would start off again. Just like that. No more reason to her than a balky mule. Two weeks later we were only off the coast of Uruguay, more than thirty degrees down from the Line.

"It was then we began to husband our provisions. When the choicest of them went, it became a question of 'burgoo' or rice.

"Burgoo—any old sailor can tell you what that is; oatmeal gruel with a dash of butter and sugar to take the curse from it—if you have the butter and sugar. If you haven't, salt is the only seasoning you get with it. The cook, under orders from the skipper, was conserving the sugar for our drinkables. So the burgoo got no sweetening. As for butter, that had gone the way of all flesh with sinful disregard of our necessities.

"We voted for burgoo. The young English officers had a silly prejudice against rice, a sort of racial antipathy for it. It was chink food. It was bad enough, they thought, to eat Scotch burgoo; but that at least was a white man's dish.

"They stood it for four days while the old *Melilla* limped along at about nine knots. Then they declared a lurid preference for rice, and that began to give out, so the crew was put on burgoo.

"That ship's larder was shamefully understocked. But you know how it is. No matter how decrepit a ship is, or how miserly her owners are, there'll always be some one to take her out. The only emergency rations we carried were oatmeal and hardtack. Both deck and fire-room were undermanned. The skipper told us the *Melilla* was owned by two Leith merchants of small means who wanted a little adventure and took it by proxy, sending the ship out, a torment to all concerned with her. We would have given considerable to have had the owners on that trip with us.

"The chinks, it seemed, didn't take kindly to the burgoo. Three meals of it were enough to convince them of its undesirability as a diet. They got the cook, who was one of themselves, to speak to the captain about it. He sent back word that the rice was practically gone, and burgoo it would be, or nothing, till we found a port. But he promised to put in at Rio for supplies.

"I didn't blame the chinks for sickening of the porridge. My stomach refused it after three days' fillings of it, and I was never noted for a delicate gizzard. But the skipper! 'I can't see what the heathen are complaining for,' he said. 'In Scotland, now——'

" 'Aye, in Scotland!' growled the chief engineer, who was half Scotch himself but had a vast preference for Irish potatoes. 'Every people to their own taste,' he said. 'How would you like a diet of bird's-nests, sir, or macaroni, say, three times a day world without end? And if I live to set foot in Leith again, there's going to be murder done there of two gentlemen.'

" 'Tush, William!' the skipper said reprovingly. 'That's no way to speak of our employers.'

" 'Tush, Tammas!' the chief said back at him with a grin. 'You've already murdered them in your heart, and that's almost the same thing, as the Good Book shows.'

"Well, the days passed pretty slow for us, as you can well imagine. Of course, the chief and his assistants were busy enough with the engines. They didn't dare turn them over very fast for fear they would shake themselves to pieces. The first and second officers, the passenger Cameron, and I, killed time playing poker. There wasn't anything else to do. We played penny-ante and got a lot of fun out of it.

"The second officer, Ward—I got to like him very well. He wasn't what you would call gay, but he was keen-minded, had been around quite a bit, and could talk about anything from Thackeray to submarines. He and I planned to go out together in another ship after we got to Leith. But the mutiny changed all that.

"IT WAS about that time that Panama disappeared. Cameron used to feed her when he first came on deck in the morning. She usually went up into the bows then. When he called her one morning she didn't come to him. We combed the ship from the fo'csle to the bunkers but never saw her again. We thought she had fallen overboard; all but Cameron, who insisted that the chinks had thrown her over. He was much upset over it.

" 'Why should the crew drown her?' we asked.

" 'Revenge,' he said. 'They've turned ugly from having no rice. I'm merely supercargo, so they vent their spite on me.'

"He got Captain MacNair's permission to search the crew's quarters again and asked me to go with him. He was so disturbed over Panama's loss that we all humored him. When he began opening the gunny bags that the chinks kept their belongings in, I said, 'You don't expect to find her in there, do you?'

" 'No,' he said. 'Panama is gone. But I thought maybe they might have kept her collar. If I should find her collar I would know that they killed her.'

"But he didn't find the collar.

"He brooded over the loss of that dog for three days, and on the third day at supper, nobody having mentioned the dog, he broke out suddenly, 'You men think it's queer, my feeling so badly over losing a dog.'

"He said it tensely, accusingly; as if we had been blaming him for his sorrow over the animal's death. He looked defiantly at Captain MacNair and went on:

"'But it isn't the dog I care so much about as her collar. I can tell you now that pigeon-blood stone in her collar was a ruby. Some archeologists are excavating an Inca temple over in northern Chile. A peon found that ruby and ran away with it. It worked its way down to the coast where I got hold of it. I don't know what it's worth—several thousand dollars, maybe. I had planned to smuggle it into Baltimore where you unload. Now you know why I feel so badly about losing that dog.'

"Toward the end of the speech his voice lost its vigorous defiance. It took on a complaining tone as if he held us responsible in some way for his misfortune.

"Besides myself there were only Captain NacNair, the chief engineer and Ward at the table. Welling, the chief officer, was on the bridge, and the assistant engineers were below. No one spoke for a moment. My first feeling was one of resentment against Cameron for breaking into our calm with his innuendos of stolen gems.

"I felt uneasy, slightly dismayed. Next thing, I thought, he will be accusing one of us directly with having killed his dog for the sake of the jewel. His words were the first discordant note to enter any of our conversations. He had placed us all under a cloud of suspicion, and at that moment I almost hated him. A restraint fell between us all. We, who only a moment before had been confident and trustful, were now self-conscious, doubtful of each other.

"Some men show disapproval by their silence. Captain MacNair was such a man. No doubt he felt outraged that this Cameron whom he had taken as a passenger as a personal favor, should abuse his hospitality by planning to smuggle gems into a friendly country, making the *Melilla*, as it were, a party to the crime.

"Cameron continued to look from one to the other of us, but we were too busy with our own thoughts to notice him. I can't say how long we would have sat there, waiting for something to relieve the situation, had not the chinks chosen that special moment to start their roughhouse. We heard a shout from Welling and a revolver shot, and almost immediately the shutting down of the engines.

"The chief was the first on deck. I was at his heels. Cameron got in MacNair's way, and I heard the skipper cursing like a stoker. The ladder to the bridge was under the raised deck aft. We saw Welling standing at the top of it holding his revolver on the crew which was packed tight around the bottom. The chinks broke away from the stairs when they saw us, retreating silently, their faces toward us, to the maindeck.

" 'My ——, don't shoot them!' the chief yelled. 'We're shorthanded now.'

"We went up on the bridge.

" 'What is it, Mr. Welling?' the captain asked.

" 'I don't know, sir. They came running along the deck shoulder to shoulder like a pack of wolves. I ordered them forward. They paid no heed to me. They tried to rush the stairs and I shot into the air. It looks to me like mutiny, sir. Some of them have knives.'

" 'There are some of my boys there,' the chief engineer said. 'I hope they haven't hurt my assistants. I'm going below.'

" 'Wait a minute, chief. We don't want to divide our forces,' the skipper said.

"He leaned over the rail and told the men to go to their quarters, and to send the cook to the bridge. The bosun, who could speak pidgin English, looked up and said:

" 'Sailor boys wantee rice, cap'n. Allee want rice, *sabe?*'

" 'Tell them,' the skipper replied, 'that there is no rice. If they will work the ship to the next port I will get some. Now go forward.'

" 'Officers eat rice, cap'n,' the bosun said.

"I saw a knife or two come out.

"MacNair turned back to us.

" 'Chief,' he said, 'we'll start the show. Don't shoot, men. They haven't any guns.'

"The engineer ripped off his coat and flung it into the wheelhouse. He was smiling. We went down the stairs. Reaching the main-deck we spread out. MacNair, Welling, and the chief took the middle. Ward and I on the flanks. The chinks stood their ground. They had reached that state of senseless fury when men do unaccountable, irrational things. They didn't know what they wanted to do. Suppose they killed us all. That wouldn't get them any rice.

"We read a lot nowadays about self-expression. Well, fighting is a form of self-expression. If those chinks had been we, they might have written a burning letter to the press declaring that the country was going to the dogs because they couldn't have rice. Then they would have gone back to their work feeling happy and virtuous. Not being so effete and sophisticated, they tried to cut us into ribbons with their knives. It was their brutish way of expressing their grievance.

"They seemed to be all there, the sixteen men of the deck crew and the twenty-four of the 'black squad.' As we closed in, several knives flashed up. We were outnumbered eight to one, but they couldn't break our front. When we struck them they gave back slightly, but rebounded. Those behind reached over those in front to stick us with their knives or claw our faces with their vile nails.

"I got my first one on the jaw and he went down. I swung again but the second chink stepped inside the blow and got his arms around my neck. I felt his putrid breath on my face. I gave him my knee below the belt. He went down squealing, thrashing on the deck under our feet.

"Welling fell with a man on top of him. The chief and I closed the gap. What the first officer did to that chink I don't know, but all the facial surgery in the world couldn't make that chink look like himself again. When Welling got up, his nose was streaming claret, and he was berserk. He charged through that squirming mass like a bat through ——. But as he turned, a chink rocked him with a blow on the head and he fell senseless.

"You see that scar?" Tansy asked, holding up his left forearm.

I nodded. It was like a long white burn and as wide as a thick pencil.

"That saved my windpipe," he went on, "and I've never regretted it, though it's marked me for life."

"We were fighting on a line running from the main hatch to the rail," Tansy continued. "Ward's flank was protected by the rail. My end was up in the air. Finally three or four chinks thought to scramble up on the hatch. But it didn't get them anything. If they came close enough to strike, I dragged them down by the legs.

"There's no denying it was going hard with us. Welling was out of it. The skipper's right arm was no longer any good except as a guard. He'd got a wicked slash near the shoulder that severed the muscles. The arm was never quite good after that. The chief engineer was as good as three ordinary men while his wind held, but years of quiet boozing had rotted his bellows. He was bleeding in half a dozen places and sobbing for breath. Ward was the only one of us who hadn't lost blood, but he had paralyzed his right arm with a swing on some chink's coco.

"I always thought it was a mistake that we hadn't got our guns first and done a little shooting. Nothing breaks the spirit of a mob like hot lead. But it was the Old Man's orders not to shoot. I am sure, though, that he hadn't expected the crew to put up much of a fight.

"Five men are no match for forty, any way you look at it, and the forty with knives and as crazy as only an obsessed Chinaman can be. They might have got us. I'm not saying. But just as that white-haired skipper was dragged down by three insane chinks, the assistant engineers bobbed up the forward companion. The way they tore into those pagans was a caution. They were fresh, and every blow knocked a Chinaman for a broken nose or a mouthful of loose teeth.

"The chinks broke and scuttled for the fo'csle. One of them never left the deck till Ward and I heaved him overboard. The chief had killed him with a short-arm chop below the ear. Two others crawled away on all fours. But they stoked us into Rio.

"The captain called a truce then, and Cameron patched us up. He was some surgeon. He had watched the fight from the bridge, ready to shoot up the rebels if they gained a distinct advantage over us. He was just going to unlimber, he said, when the engineers got into the game.

"AND then began the queerest sport I ever bet money on. Ward and I played it. We called it 'chink-snatching.' It consisted of sneaking down to the fo'csle, grabbing off a chink and beating it before the others stuck us with their knives. If we got one we turned him over to the engineers, and Heaven help him if he didn't shovel coal. Great sport while it lasted, but it came to a sorry end. Before each raid we would lay wagers with Welling and Cameron on our chances of capturing a Chinaman. The chinks had to keep the bulkhead open for air, but after we pounced in on them a few times they learned to set a guard. They wouldn't come out of themselves to work the ship. Too stubborn.

"It makes me think of the night raids on the German trenches over there in the Toul sector. Was your division ever there?" Tansy asked.

"No," I said. "But we used to slip across the Marne opposite Jaulgonne, just before the Germans came across on the fifteenth, and bring back a square-head or two for our intelligence section to question. I know what you mean. It must have been something like that, going down into the forecastle expecting them to pass you a grenade any minute. Go on."

"Yes, it was something like that," Tansy said, "only we didn't want the chinks for any information we could get out of 'em. Just wanted them for fire-room work. First time down we got two. That was because we took them so by surprize. After ten or a dozen raids we got enough to fire one boiler with a shift.

"And then we learned that the chinks were sneaking up on deck at night for water, and we began stalking them. That was how Ward got killed. And that put an end to chink-snatching.

"It was the second night after the mutiny. We were getting close to Rio and the skipper said he might turn off the crew there and get a white crew.

"Well, Ward and I were down on deck, laying for a chink. It was quite dark. We thought we saw a shadow come up the companion. It vanished, going aft.

"'You take the starboard side,' Ward whispered.

"The chink went up the port side ahead of Ward, turned across under the bridge, and came down my side. I couldn't understand what he was after. Just prowling, I suppose. I was crouching close to the rail and when he came opposite, I grabbed him.

"'I've got him, Ward,' I said. 'One more for the stokehole.'

"But Ward didn't answer. I took the chink below and turned him over to the engineer on duty.

"I wondered about Ward and returned to the deck and began looking for him. I found him face down on the main-deck. He had been stabbed through the neck from behind and must have fallen just as I grabbed that chink because I didn't hear him hit the deck. A second Chinaman must have come up and stalked Ward while he was stalking the first man.

"Ward's death made us all pretty blue. The skipper didn't say much to me about it, but to Welling he seemed to assume that I was to blame for the second officer's death. Which was rather strange, because it was Ward who proposed the chink-snatching and was so keen about it. I missed him more than I care to say.

"WHEN we got to Rio the skipper turned the crew over to the authorities, charging them with mutiny and murder. We made our depositions, shipped a white crew, replaced some machinery parts and sailed for Baltimore.

"But something happened there at Rio that puzzled the skipper and me for months. I can't explain it all yet.

"Learning that we were getting rid of the Chinese crew, Cameron decided against going on to Baltimore with us. He was confident that the Chinamen had the big ruby, so he was going to stop in Rio for a while to see if he could recover it. The day that the Brazilian authorities took the Chinamen ashore, he asked if he might search the crew before they left the ship. The captain couldn't well refuse the request, though none of us had felt the same toward Cameron after he told us that he intended to smuggle the ruby into the United States. So when the crew lined up on deck with their baggage, he went through them, even made them remove their shoes.

"Of course, he didn't find the jewel, but after he had gone ashore, I went down to the fo'csle to look at the ports, and there sticking out from under a gunny-sack away up in the peak, I saw an end of Panama's collar. Dragging it out, I found the ruby still in its setting. Later, following up a suspicion of mine, I found some bones in the ash-pit in the galley that certainly were not beef bones.

"The skipper and I concluded that the chinks, tiring of eating burgoo, had killed and eaten Panama. The cook probably saved the collar because of its gaudy prettiness. Of course he didn't know its value or he would not have discarded it. He had doubtless planned to carry it away with him, till he learned that he was under arrest. Then, fearing that possession of the collar would complicate matters for him, he hid it hastily where I found it.

"For a long hour the skipper and I debated what to do with it, finally deciding that the only right thing was to return it to Cameron. I spent the most of three days on shore looking for him, but he seemed to have vanished.

"When I went to see the captain a year later at Leith he still had the ruby, but was anxious to sell it for anything it would bring as he needed money. I agreed, and we made a trip to London where we got three hundred and fifty pounds for it. I took a hundred and fifty and made him keep the two hundred."

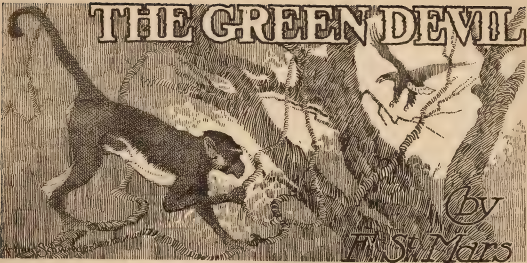
Tansy sighed.

"If I had all that money now! But I had a smoking good time while it lasted.

"So," he concluded, "it isn't the army I think about now when I eat rice. It's nitrates I think of, and burgoo, and that big ruby that Panama wore on her collar, and engine-trouble, and the mutiny, with the crazy chinks crawling all over us and slashing us with their wicked knives. Those were the days!"

THE GREEN DEVIL

by F. St. Mars



Author of "The Swordsman," "Emperor of the Dragons," etc.

Here we sit in a branchy row,
Thinking of beautiful things we know,
Dreaming of deeds that we meant to do,
All complete—in a minute or two——

Something noble, and wise, and good,
Done by merely wishing we could.
We've forgotten, but—never mind.
Brother, thy tail hangs down behind.
(Road Song of The Bandar-log.)

TO BE called green is bad enough, but to be christened a monkey as well—a monkey that is green, a green monkey! One might imagine that was almost too much.

However, in Mona's case, the green was less than skin deep. A mixture of black and yellowish hairs on his back gave him that greenish appearance. His underparts, as well as his fine brushed back side-whiskers, were a rich orange any beast could be proud of, as also a narrow forehead-band. For the rest, he was black—skull-cap, face, hands, and feet, all black; black, too, according to all who had dealings with him, was his heart. Certainly black was his scowl—his scowl that would not rub off. Finally, he taped about eighteen inches, and had a tail just as long besides.

Not that Mona had always been ebon of expression and character, so to speak. In his youth he knew irresponsible fun and frolic, as irrepressible as many such did now in the troop that he led. He had only become soured with age, like many who are not monkeys, the result of too often finding himself "done," or "left," and too seldom right—if one may so put it. The result, too, of being considered good to eat by so many of the wild kindred. Besides—well, what would you? He was the leader of a troop of monkeys. Surely that was excuse enough for anything—forty and four monkeys, mark you.

Mona dropped twenty feet through the top branches of the towering wild-fig tree as if he were going to commit suicide and have done with it. Casually he hooked out a long black hand, caught a clinging rope-like liana, swung, reswung, and came to anchor in a sitting position upon a big bough beside a young male monkey of his own ilk.

The latter had been at business with something, and now hastily, with absurd expressions of fear, tried to cover the fact up. Mona stood up, slid one skinny hand under the chin of the other from behind, jerked the latter's head upward and backward, and gave him one long diabolical look deep down into his eyes from above. Only one look, mind you, but it was enough. That young citizen of monkeydom removed, not slowly, very, very quietly, and without saying a word, leaving behind him the half of a banana that he had evidently so much prized as to hide. Mona finished it in contemplative silence, as one who had the right.

Thereafter Mona scratched, peered round under his scowling ridged brows, with something of the quickness of a bird, and all but the calculating intelligence of a man, and walked off, with his peculiar flat-footed, high-rumped gait, to where the swish and sway of leaves below hinted that some members of his troop were enjoying themselves.

From branch to creeper, vine to bushy twig, tendril to main trunk, he dropped, and swung, and slid, and sprang as easily as a man going down his own stairs, and ten times more gracefully.

He beheld a group of the younger generation of green monkeys—absolutely effervescing with mischief and fun—greatly excited over plunder in the shape of bananas they were stealing—in stealthy rushes—from a planted clearing in the forest down below. And Mona might so far have forgotten himself as to grin at the thought that the risk—every moment a monkey spends in the open is a risk—should be theirs; but the spoil—which he now prepared to take from them—was going to be his. It was characteristic, however, of the old ruffian's almost cautious cunning that he should first glance *upward*.

Then—then he fell, clean, sheer, and instantly off his perch, down through the branches, with a swishing crash, as if he had been shot.

A DOUR and silent beast at all times, Mona did not say anything at all—then. No need perhaps. All knew that crash and its meaning. Every monkey in sight leaped or dived for cover as if each were a portion of a single exploding shell; and mothers, gathering up little ones to their breasts, sprang with one hand and two feet as surprisingly nimble, or apparently as nimble, as the rest with all four.

Now if you had been standing anywhere within a quarter of a mile of that spot you could scarce have failed to hear a rushing noise in the air. Looking up, you would have beheld, as it were, a mighty barb falling out of the brazen sky. That barb was a living one, and if it had continued its headlong dive earthward to its logical conclusion, it would have precisely struck in its course and that exactly on the back of the neck, one crusty old, cunning old green monkey named Mona, if— Exactly.

Mona, as we know, held other views as to the use of the back of his neck than as a perch for a tearing, rending, tiger-clawed, martial, crested eagle, which was the name this living barb sailed under really. He, Mona (bother our language), had, also as we know, flung himself to the ground—about the only time in his life that he regarded actual terra-firma with anything but deep suspicion—and though there was nothing to prevent the eagle from continuing its dramatic plunge to him there, Mona knew very well she would not.

The eagle, in fact, suddenly produced at the last moment great round wings; checked herself instantly, just when it seemed too late—and that was magic enough indeed—and swept away in one direction on one grand masterly curve, while Mona bolted for the nearest tree in the other direction. The eagle would have dashed herself to pieces else; but her thin scream was vibrant with rage, and a warning to Mona concerning the future.

Mona's passage treeward was considerably accelerated by a little, lean, lithe jackal, ever ready to chase or to fly, a snapper up of unfortunates, an attender of the dead.

Fortunately for Mona, however, that precise corner of "the dark continent" knew two kinds of jackals, unlike as could be; and this one was, so to say, the other kind, the side-striped one. Had it been *mesomelas* of the silver-black back, Mona's long tail would have been snapped off long ere he reached that tree—*acacia aribica* of the vile five or six inch thorns, it was—whereon, sitting in the prickliest part of one of the prickliest trees in a land of prickles, he made demon grimaces at the open-mouthed jackal below, and the martial eagle, now "waiting on," like a floating mote on the eye, above, and back again.

Mona stamped his hands presently when the jackal loped away; and still more at the patient, deadly speck floating in wide circles overhead, because it would not go away. His patience was the patience of all the monkey folk—nil. His temper short as his own memory. Yet it did seem absurd that, in the end, a glossy, self-confident bird no bigger than a starling, whose name was drongo shrike, should turn up and drive the mighty eagle from that vicinity.

Escaping thence from that tree, crab fashion by reason of those thorns aforementioned, Mona, half an hour from his hurried entry into same, sought his very own, but by no means loving, flock.

HE WAS fully aware the while, as his hurry attested, that, if either of his besiegers came back and caught him on the hop, so to speak, they would have handed him out death quick as a snowflake melts outside a pastry-cook's shop. Monkey meat being, as the saying is in the wild, everybody's meat—some compare it to chicken, others to veal—and monkeys absolutely refusing to mind their own business, and trying to play man with only the glimmerings of a soul to do it upon as they do, monkeys, you will note, find the wild world hard and cruel.

By what form of semi-human reasoning Mona followed, and found, his fickle companions I do not profess to understand. Certain it is, however, they did not help him; for, as happens so often, what had been precocious smartness, sharpness, cheek, intelligence, mischief, roguery, sleight (and light) of finger, exaggerated nimbleness of body and mind, all but human intelligence foiled by more than childish waywardness, forgetfulness, fitfulnes, uncertainty, pettishness, overaffection, absurd affectation in youth, had in age developed into smoldering red-hot temper, cunning, bullying bluster, selfish, sullen, wicked spite.

Certain it is, too, Mona did not trail by scent—he, who like all monkeys probably, could do little more with his nose than man himself. But he knew where they had gone, and he went there, and the manner of his going was sufficiently startling for anybody.

Difficult it is to estimate his speed, except to be sure that it was considerable. Difficult, also, to picture to you that amazing gait of his, the flying aerial march of all the monkeys when they travel, which must be seen to be understood.

Never once did he touch ground, never once check, never once falter or pause in his long flying dives from forest spire to mid-level; in his unerring aim at tendril, or vine, or across the giddy spaces, in his almost rocket-like ascents to the overworld of the forest's green roof again, quick nearly as his sensational descents; in his dizzy leaps and almost as dizzy tight-rope gallops along lianas suspended between heaven and earth; in his faultless trapezing, his effortless vaults athwart the green cliffs—his calm, his perfect balance, made possible, I feel sure, by his long tail, which, though not a prehensile "fifth hand" in the sense that the tails of South African monkeys are, nevertheless more than paid for its board and lodging, so to speak, by making Mona almost everything in the air short of a bird.

More amazing even, could it have been more apparent, more startling, had it not been glossed over in such a natural, matter-of-fact way, was the manner in which, without fear, Mona encountered and eluded danger. Such "close calls" would have made a man's hair curl for half a day, and have shattered his nerve for a week. If they affected the monkey at all it was but a passing phase, and scarce noticeable. So it is often in the wild, and makes the wild creatures so hard to understand, the scene so bare, to unseeing eyes, of episode.

As thus, when, negotiating a vine at full speed, Mona found that, one foot ahead, it ceased to be a vine and became a green tree snake. The sheer fall into vacuity to avoid this horror was no more startling in its unhesitating instantaneousness than in the almost magic facility with which a bush-rope, forty feet below, was selected, caught hold of, and swung from to the next. As again when, remembering almost always to—

> Lend no rotten bough thy strength

—one such snapped beneath him as he plunged headlong into a forested ravine, but recovered, by changing hands, on another branch almost without a check in his stride. As again, too, when a Bateleur eagle, red of face and claw and heart, slid along with him as he crossed the surface of that apparently endless green sea that represented the primeval forest roof.

In this case, the unhesitating "side step" to a red and waxen blossom that collapsed under his weight, as, in turn, he left it for a mass of draped and bearded lichen, which, crumbling beneath him, left him dodging round a tree-bole there to vanish utterly, because, clapped against the bark "frozen," he became, once momentarily hidden, merely merged into his motionless green surroundings.

WHEN Mona finally sighted his fickle flock, they were on the edge of one of those large clearings in the otherwise unbroken impenetrable (except for elephant paths) primeval forest, for which no one has ever yet been able to account. He came straight from more than religious gloom among the towering columnar juniper trunks under the wondrous unbroken green canopy of gigantic branches interlaced for miles into white-hot, blinding sunlight, and it made him blink. But he saw instantly that since it had left him, probably for dead, it had amalgamated with another troop, making a band now nearly a hundred strong, instead of about fifty.

It was that hour, the hottest, most glaring of the twenty-four, when all nature is silent, gasping, or asleep. Only the rustle of a resplendent banded trogan on a branch, fluttering his wings in defiance of the molten sun, and very far away up the slope a sound, unspeakably eery in its strangeness, as if the very wood gods themselves were playing long-drawn, ringing notes upon the rims of giant glasses, broke the utter stillness—the constantly repeated cry of some hornbill, possibly on guard near his tree-bole nest. But how can I tell you? How with hard, cold, machine-made pen make you see?

There is a glamor about the wonderland of the African primeval forest, through which one walks like a little child through Fairyland, every turn revealing fresh marvels, every glance giving up beauty hitherto unthought of, every vista disclosing secrets almost beyond our dreams.

It was characteristic of Mona and his deep suspicion of all things—warranted enough, it may readily be—that he took good care to see before being seen. Typical of him personally that, while furtively scowling every way around with his quick, almost bird-like sharpness, he should creep closer and closer to the monkey troop feeding upon beans planted—it was base exaggeration to call it cultivated—by some natives in the clearing. A few individuals were at business, too, with the fallen fruit—marula apples, perhaps—under a tree on the edge of both forest and crops.

From his final, unseen perch in this latter tree, Mona looked down upon the green backs of the feeders below. It is quite possible for monkeys to be conscious of wrong-doing. Those out among the crops were very much on the alert. Those beneath the tree not so much so.

These latter numbered five—two old females, concerned as to the welfare of babes in arms, whose eternal look of tired surprize Mona could see quite plainly as they clung to their mother's breast upside down; two gamboling, very young males, and one young female in her prime. Her the old reprobate watched.

But as he watched he fed, and as he fed he wastefully let fall, as monkeys and many birds do, much of that fruit he plucked. Used perhaps to the falling of fruit as much through birds as by natural growth, those below began to pick up what Mona let fall. Gradually all five were directly beneath him, till suddenly the fact seemed to strike the semi-human intelligence of the brute for the first time.

Filling his cheek pouches and having eaten his fill, Mona did not stop gathering fruit, but continued, dropping each handful thoughtfully, and watching, with old-man-like, wrinkled brows, the squabbling that began to take place over his largesse. Gradually, as he picked fruit, he soundlessly, stealthily let himself down.

His arrival, dropping like a stone among them on the heels of the last handful, was as unexpected as it was dramatic. Nor did he give them any time for recovery.

It has always seemed to be a matter for remark that those wild folk who are most ruthlessly persecuted by their neighbors should themselves be the most ruthless to their own kind. Take our own rabbit as a case in point. So it was with Mona.

His venomous dart at the nearest young male monkey, his vicious bite, that left a red flank gash, followed as instantly by his rebounding like a rubber ball to the second, his cuffs at the mothers—quick as a snake's stroke they seemed—and, before all four had vanished, scampering in terror, his remorseless galloping drive of the young female before him up into the towering foliage that flanked the clearing round "like cliffs of riven obsidian," was all as unnecessarily merciless as it was amazingly quick.

HALF-WAY up a giant juniper Mona stopped to peer down and back. His abduction of his young bride—a member of the other troop, by the way—was one thing. His power to hold her against the wrath to come another. He saw the leader of the other troop, a very fine young male green monkey in his prime, come racing over the ground in the blinding sunlight; saw him swarming up the great tree-trunk at a hand-gallop and without a check, and knew that he had absconded with that leader's favorite.

Swiftly he turned and drove the female before him, still upward, and ever up, as if he would seek the very forest spires. She would have broken back had she dared, but the expression on old Mona's black face was diabolical and no thing to trifle with.

Suddenly he stopped. Suddenly they both stopped. A very peculiar and eery sound was emanating from the dense mass of foliage at the great tree's summit, where the mighty branches, reaching always upward for the light, found it at last and spread out in a dense tangle on all sides, intertwined with creepers and the branches of its neighbors. It was as though the very gods of the forests themselves were perched aloft there crooning the "Songs of the Primeval Woods."

"*Muruh-muruh-muruh-rrrrmuh - rrrrmuh-muruh quoi-quo-quo-quo-rrrr*," now rising and swelling in weird chorus, now falling and dying away like the moan of the sad wind, it rang through the woods, as uncanny a chant as was ever listened to by "demon lover" in enchanted halls.

It was, as a matter of fact, the song of a party of Colobus monkeys, whose beautiful long black-and-white slashed fur and tails could now be seen on the overworld roof of the forest, moving to and fro above.

Mona dashed ahead, was as promptly met by the old male leader of the handsomest of all the monkeys, with bared teeth and warning abuse, turned, and dashed a little way down again; the path was barred; but that feud could wait. The other could not.

One has heard the saying "red-hot devils" often enough, perhaps; but this, this battle that followed on the roof of the forest between the two rival leaders of the green monkeys was the thing itself in the very flesh. By the same token, it is hopeless to describe it properly. Mind, up there in that dizzy place, there was no room for error—a slip, a false step meant one clean abysmal dive of at least one hundred feet and a crumpled death upon the black, moist earth below.

Nor was the fight like unto the fighting of other beasts. Half-human, half-animal, it was wholly demoniacal. In the vicious, short, lightning chops with the yellow teeth, the frenzied "clinches," the snake-twist "breaks away," the tense wrestles, the fiendish "worrying," the coughing curses—in everything, except actual fact, it was the battle of fiends, of fiends incarnate, not little beasties of the wild at all.

The younger beast had the agility of his opponent, had, too, maybe, slightly the strength over him; but not the devil's own cunning that lived back of the smoldering, bloodshot orbs of old Mona.

Suddenly the old villain wrenched at his opponent's tail. The other as suddenly chopped round to break that hold, cut his thin knuckles to the bone, but, for one briefest fraction of time, that twisting bite left the younger animal's throat open to the foe. And Mona was there—both black, gripping, vice-like hands and all cutting teeth—he was there quick as light.

Back swayed the younger, inch by tense, forced, foaming inch, inch by clutching, choking, toppling inch. Then—over—down.

For half a dozen awful seconds they hung—and swung—Mona alone holding a creeper, which was life, with his right foot, wrenching the clutching black hands away that clung to him, biting the fingers that held. Then—ah!

A scream, a falling streak, a crash as the younger monkey shot through some climbing fern, a marvelous clutch, swing, drop, crash, clutch, swing again, and the soft thud on the earth below.

MONA, sick and giddy, pulled himself up, swayed, coughed, and drove his new mate before him in the wake of the now fast disappearing monkey troop to a safer place.

Night, swiftly marching over the tree-tops, caught him suddenly, as night does in those parts, before he could recover sufficient strength to overtake the hurrying double troop.

Torn and red and weak, his sure cunning still held, however, and he chose a night's roosting-place in a tremendous Phœnix palm. Nay, more, he pulled the tail of a nesting pigeon, and, when she faced around to retaliate, he stole her eggs. He put his hand into a hole and brought out a young woodpecker. It the two devoured. They finished with nuts.

Huddled together, they faced the hours of dreadful night. Ere the extraordinary squeak chorus of the hyrax had ceased—those amazing dwarf-hoofed animals which ran about the trees like squirrels—they heard the hair-raising, persistent screaming that tells of monkeys being harassed by leopards, and Mona knew how the troop, bereft of his cunning leadership, had chosen an evil camping-place, and suffered. They heard the claws of a serval cat scratching on the palm trunk, but not liking it, or its leaves, retired again with low, feline curses.

Then, the gray chill dawn, with all its wonderful bird choruses, the majesty of the sun that rent the mists, and Mona, cunning, calm, swinging along unerringly, his bride before, returning this time, thrice welcomed to his shivering, leaderless troop and the troop of his deceased foe.

Arthur Schwieder

SAME OLD VIC

by Romaine H. Lowdermilk

Author of "Mud," "The Single Stah," etc.

YEARS ago Charley File grew too old for bronco peeling and moved into town, where he accepted a position at the Palace Livery Stable. There he has curried and fed and saddled horses for dudes ever since with but one real vacation. That was the time he returned with his car.

And such a car! A thing of wondrous lines and power; of yellow-leather upholstery; of gold-plated robe-rail and beveled plate glass; of nickled wheels and massive tires; and an engine—well, old Charley File boasts of ninety thoroughbreds corraled under the hood of his car, and his speed seems to prove it. He has fitted up a stall at the Palace as a sort of garage and spends his spare moments tuning up his wonder-car.

It all began when old Charley went into the Isis to see Victor Vyne in "Heartbeats and Saddle-Leather." The picture had flickered off two reels of its lively footage before Charley realized that the lithe figure of the principal character was familiar. A few moments more and old Charley was stealing softly from the darkened interior of the Isis.

His reason for leaving was simple. He had discovered that Victor Vyne, the movie hero, was Vic Tipps. Victor Vyne, at that moment enlivening the Isis screen in "Heartbeats and Saddle-Leather," was old Vic Tipps!

It was then that Charley File determined to take a vacation. His procedure was straightforward. He simply went to the proprietor of the Palace Livery and announced he was going away for two or three weeks.

An hour later, aboard a train bound for Los Angeles, he sat back in his seat contentedly. So Vic Tipps had made himself into one of these here movie actors! Charlie mused. Well, if Vic was a movie star he'd likely have a lot of money. And if Vic Tipps had a lot of money—well, old Charley knew how to get it away from him.

That is, he could if Vic hadn't changed. Anyway it was worth taking a little trip to find out. For Charley needed money. Old Charley File always needed money.

People had wondered, in Prescott, what had become of Vic Tipps. They'd known Vic well ten years ago, and some of them had lost a valued source of income when Vic left as he did—suddenly, on the day Prescott staged her first cowboy contest.

Prescott's first cowboy contest was to be a big affair. A purse of one thousand dollars was to be divided among the bronco busters, which was pretty good money ten years ago. Contestants entering the steer-roping, the bulldogging and other events were equally well provided for.

Cowboys had saved for months to be assured of sufficient entry-fee money. Vic Tipps was punching cows at forty a month in those days, and he came into town the day before the contest with one month's pay and an overweening desire to enter in about fifty dollars' worth of events. That is, he craved to take part in the bronco busting, the same requiring a preliminary putting-up of twenty cash dollars as an entry fee.

Too, he was eager to compete in the roping of the steers, which meant the putting-up of another twenty. Then there was the little matter of bulldogging; Vic was fully as anxious to display his skill and win the reward in that line of endeavor—ten dollars entry fee!

Vic thought he knew a way by which he could increase his forty to an amount that would cover those entry fees and pay current expenses as well, and he had brought with him certain ivory cubes with which to accomplish that end.

Two hours after his arrival in Prescott he had nine dollars left. He wooed fortune on the floor at the Palace Livery.

"If you fellas'd quit ropin' me inta your crap games," Vic complained bitterly, "I'd have some chancet in this country."

"It was jist accidental." Charley File was cheerfully wrapping his share of the winnings in a tobacco-sack. "Jist accidental."

"Why, even loaded dice won't roll right for me," mourned Vic. "I'm gonna leave this country some day an' go where nobody don't know me. I'm gonna cut out crap-shootin' an' quit losin' all my money. For three years straight I've lost forty dollars a month to you fellas."

"Stay with us a while longer," Charley urged. "Things'll begin rollin' yer way pretty soon. Mebby you'll win it all back."

"No more for me," declared Vic. "I'll never shoot again. I'm quits."

"I hate to see yuh quit," admitted old Charley, "an' I think if somebody'll jist say 'Fade me, cowboy,' an' roll out a pair yuh'll crawl a mile on yer hands and knees to accommodate 'im."

"Not no more."

Vic shook his head solemnly.

"I have quit, q-u-i-t, quit! Here I got nine dollars left. Where do I get twenty to put up for the bronc-ridin'? Where's any ten for bulldoggin'? Where's any twenty to enter the ropin'? I had it—er some of it anyhow. Now look at me."

Vic counted his money gloomily.

"Nine dollars! Yah!"

Squatting on his heels, Charley File counted out nine silver dollars.

"Shoot yuh all or any part of it," he stated, flipping out a pair of yellowed dice.

Vic Tipps flopped to his knees.

"Shoot four bits," he snapped, grabbing the dice.

Old Charley quit while Vic still had three dollars. But three dollars, even in the hands of a genius, can't last. And Vic was a genius; he must have been or he couldn't have borrowed a dollar and forty cents from old Charley. But he got it, and then worked all day among his friends gathered for the contest and by night was reported to have gleaned eight dollars and forty cents, total.

Desperately in need of money for his entrance fees, Vic evolved a plan that would bring him huge sums. It was so easy he wondered that no one else had thought of it. A carnival company was in Prescott that week, replete with contrivances eager to supply cash to whoever was in need. Vic simply planned to win some of their money.

Gas flares lit up the busy wheels clicking off "lucky numbers." Loud voices urged one and all to buy a paddle and receive a huge cash reward. For fifty cents you could win fifty dollars at the wheels. They'd even pay you a dollar if you knocked three stuffed tomcats off the perch at three balls f'r a dime.

"Roulette, roulette," bawled a human fog-horn. "Real money you get. You win fifty dollars for fifty cents!"

That sounded good to Vic Tipps. He hurried right up to the brightly lighted counter.

"Gimme a paddle," and he laid down fifty cents.

Ten numbers were on his paddle. Others crowded up and bought paddles until it seemed some one was bound to win. That's the way the proprietor wanted it to seem. But somehow the luckiest numbers were strangely reluctant to register. Vic won a huge box of candy, which upon being opened proved to contain but a very few pieces of very ancient candy.

However, there was that fifty dollars to be given to the holder of the paddle bearing that number—provided the wheel stopped at that number—and Vic tried it again and again, once with four paddles, until it dawned upon him that the possibility of one certain number showing up on a wheel bearing more than two hundred is not very potent. Reluctantly he relinquished his paddle to another eager to win the fifty.

"We're shooting dice, boys."

A lovely lady cast bright glances at the passing throng. Idly she cast four dice from a leather cup.

"Twenty-five dollars if you throw four sixes or four fours."

Vic shied at this. Dice had been his hobby—and his downfall. He knew the difficulty of producing the combination necessary to collect the twenty-five.

But even as he thought, the beautiful lady cast the dice from her cup. On the green velvet four sixes stood in a row! Vic Tipps was astonished. He hadn't believed such a thing possible. He paused.

"Try your luck, cowboy."

The lady held out the leather cup invitingly.

"A dime, ten cents. Won't make you nor break you. Twenty-five dollars if you get four sixes or fours. You win a prize for every pair."

She indicated the collection of gold-wire and shell jewelry decorating the back and sides of her booth.

Vic Tipps stepped closer.

"Try it once, cowboy," urged the dulcet tones.

The lady shook the cup and rolled out—four fours.

Vic laid down his dime. He got a pair of fives. For that he won a shell stick-pin. The pin was quite lovely in the bright light of the flares, and Vic was thinking he could sell it for at least a quarter. But it crushed in his fingers as he pressed it into his neckerchief.

Still with his own eyes he had seen the lady throw four sixes and then four fours. He argued with himself that possibly the dice were fixed to fall that way once in every so often so as to stimulate trade. That sort of figuring cost him a dollar more; for, with the desire to win the twenty-five strong within him, he made ten valiant attempts to duplicate the lady's feat. He left the booth with a half-dozen shell ornaments dangling from his shirt bosom.

He felt that if he'd just won that lucky number on the wheel, or had the dice fallen right, he might even now be carrying fifty or a hundred dollars. The thought cheered him. Having eaten nothing since noon, he stopped at a savory lunch-stand and devoured a sandwich and cup of coffee worth possibly fifteen cents—it cost forty.

A sloping table, baize covered, spread with bills and coin next caught the attention of Vic Tipps. A rope held back the eager players who, with rings at three for a quarter, were allowed to carry off whatever they could encircle with their rings.

Vic, hastily finishing his meager lunch, hastened over. When he learned his throwing hand could almost touch the fortune littered table nothing on earth could have stopped him from investing in three rings.

He aimed at the twenty-dollar gold-piece reposing in the center of the collection. The slant of the table was deceptive, and two of his rings fell aimlessly. But the third encircled a penny. This was an omen of good fortune, and Vic took another quarter's worth of rings.

He still had four dollars left in his pocket when he gave it up. He was becoming vaguely alarmed. It seemed his luck had gone back on him or something. This wasn't easy money.

"Here y'are, here y'are, here y'are!" howled a voice. "Here y'are, here y'are, here y'are! Battling Lucas, the cowboy middle-weight, gives one hundred dollars to any one staying four rounds. Any weight up to a hundred an' sixty. Come on up, boys. Free admission to anybody who'll put on the gloves with Battling Lucas!"

If boxing had been strychnin Vic Tipps could have eaten all he knew about it and it wouldn't have hurt him a bit. Still, here was something free—with a golden chance to earn one hundred dollars. Whether or not he could stay four rounds with this Battling Lucas wasn't to be considered. He could try. Vic had been in some pretty stiff fights. Besides, that hundred would admit him to the roping, the bronc-riding, the bulldogging and numerous other events on the morrow.

Moreover this was free. No fifty cents, or quarter, or dime, was being demanded to try his luck. This was a fair opportunity to win one hundred dollars merely by staying four rounds—whatever they were—with somebody named Battling Lucas. This was surely worthy of due consideration. Vic resolved to go in and win.

A crowd was coming out of the fighting-tent; evidently a bout had just been concluded. A man in ring togs took his place under the punching-bag on the platform by the entrance and set the bag drumming expertly.

"Battling Lucas gives a hundred dollars to any weight up to a hundred an' sixty who stays four rounds!" bellowed the announcer to the crowd that was assembling to witness the bag-punching. "Free admission to anybody who puts on the gloves."

Vic Tipps waited no longer. He even feared some one else might step in ahead of him and get the hundred! He stepped forward.

"Want to box?" queried the announcer. Vic nodded and swallowed nervously.

"All right; come up on the platform—here with me." The announcer indicated a place beside him.

As Vic mounted the steps he noted with pleasure that the man at the punching-bag was almost a foot shorter than himself.

The announcer had been busy, and a stream of spectators was straying within the tent. When all the live ones had sought admission and another candidate or two had joined Vic they were shunted inside. The bag-puncher vaulted into the ring and Vic was boosted up with him. The crowd commented freely.

Vic removed the ornaments from his shirt and placed them carefully in his pockets, meanwhile glaring balefully at his opponent. A pair of big practise gloves were laced on his hands by two seconds who plied him with hoarse advice, most of which consisted of urgings to rush in and slug his opponent off his feet.

As the gong sounded Vic, following the advice, leaped to the center of the ring. He even felt he was destined to win the bout and the hundred.

Vic Tipps did his best. But things happened rapidly that first round. It developed that Battling Lucas was just as eager to defend that hundred as Vic was to win it, and a lively scrimmage marked the opening. For the remainder of his ring début Vic Tipps was battling for his life. But Battling Lucas was a merciful young gentleman; and, having other applicants awaiting their turn at the hundred, he simply tipped Mr. Tipps over the ropes.

Kind hands assisted Vic to his feet and removed the gloves. Friendly strangers brushed him off and sympathetic voices urged him to remain for the other bouts. But Vic had enough. Another hundred had gone glimmering.

Without the tent it occurred to Vic to feel in his pockets. His money was gone! So was the shell jewelry—and his tobacco. His pockets were all empty! Vic saw red. Good thing Battling Lucas hadn't met him in any such mood as this. He circled aimlessly a while then started glumly for the Palace Livery where he had his bed-roll. It was getting late, and the crowd was thinning.

"I BEG your pardon?"

A voice, at once kindly but authoritative, caused him to look around. He beheld a pretty young lady—a very severely tailored and business-like young lady. Vic remembered her as one he had seen earlier in the evening pinning bright bits of ribbon inscribed in gilt "Prescott Cowboy Contest."

Vic had side-stepped her then because the recipient of the ribbon was supposed to ante fifty cents to the enterprising young lady. Vic hadn't thought it worth fifty cents. But now he waited.

"I beg your pardon," repeated the young lady, coming up to him. "But I saw you come out of the Battling Lucas tent and I just wanted to ask you if—if they robbed you in there?"

"You bet they did, ma'am," Vic replied convincingly, at the same time wishing he could say the word "ask" like she said it, like a sweet fairy saying "awsk." "They stole every dang thing I had."

"Oh, that's too bad!" she exclaimed with quick sympathy. "They're a hard bunch in there."

Quickly resuming her business-like air, she took on a tone of authority.

"I am one of the owners of this carnival company, and it is the purpose of the management to eliminate all such pocket-picking and unfair games. We can not afford to allow our patrons to leave the grounds feeling they have been robbed, so if you will kindly state the amount you have lost I will make it up to you now and compel the Lucas crowd to reimburse me or get off the lot."

"How's that?"

Vic was beginning to doubt any one could be so generous. Too, he was wondering if here wasn't his chance to secure the needed entry money.

"You say you'll pay me back what money I've been robbed out of here this evenin'?"

"On behalf of the management I will return to you whatever was taken while in the Lucas tent."

"Fifty dollars," Vic lied anxiously. "Fifty dollars they got from me in there."

He assumed a defensive attitude, expecting that of course she would nail so palpable a misstatement.

Immediately, and without offering a single objection, the young lady briskly drew out a roll of bills. Vic's breath came faster as he viewed the large denominations represented therein. She selected three twenty-dollar bills.

"Here you are," she stated crisply as she handed the three rumpled beauties to Vic.

"Thanks," mumbled Vic dazedly. "Thank you, *ma'am!*"

Nudging at his hat-brim with his fingers, he turned to go on his way.

"But—it was fifty dollars you lost? Was it not?" she reminded him.

"Oh, yeah. Sure."

Vic halted and turned about a couple of times. "Yeah, fifty. Uh-h-h——"

"But I gave you three twenties. That is sixty. Can you get me the change, please?"

Deftly she reached out and removed the bills from his hands.

"I'm sorry, but I haven't any small change with me and I do not wish any of the other concessionaires to learn that we are watching them so I will have to ask—" oh, how she did say that word!—"you to kindly go and get the change from some of your friends quietly and bring it to me here. In twenty minutes?"

"All right," sighed Vic.

He was getting used to seeing money slip out of his grasp.

"I'll—I'll be back. I guess I c'n——"

Suddenly a thought occurred to Vic Tipps. He left the carnival grounds on high. Arriving at the Palace Livery he found old Charley File in charge.

"Charley, can you give me ten doll'rs on my saddle?"

"Uh-hum," replied Charley. "Throw it in the office here so's we c'n keep't locked up."

The Palace was always in need of good saddles and stood ready to loan small amounts at any time. So as Vic's saddle took up its new abode in the security of the Palace "office" ten dollars passed from Charley File, Palace representative, to Vic Tipps, a gentleman seeking easy money.

Vic waited around almost ten minutes at the carnival grounds before the young lady again appeared.

"Oh, you've come back!" she exclaimed as if she'd thought he was gone for good. Then briskly—

"Here is the money."

She offered him the three twenties.

"Thanks," breathed Vic, handing her his ten. "Much 'bliged."

"You are welcome." And she was gone.

Sixty dollars! Vic crumpled the soft notes in his hand and jammed his hand deep in his pants pocket. Sixty dollars! True, he had been obliged to pawn his saddle for the ten dollars change. But at that he was fifty to the good, and fifty would enter him in the riding, the bulldogging and the roping.

Vic was elated. Already he heard the plaudits of the multitude as he would win all the events on the morrow. That he had secured the money by misrepresentation did not trouble Vic whatever. Vic was carefree in those days.

He made his way to the Palace hay-loft and his bed. He did not sleep well that night; he tossed about restlessly, eager for the contest tomorrow. He felt now and then beneath his blankets to see if after all it wasn't just a dream. But the folded bills were always there. Wonderful good fortune had befallen him.

Now and then some late stayer would clump noisily up the narrow wooden stair; then would come a rustling of hay and the scratching on heavy canvas as the newcomer unrolled his bed; followed by grunting as tight boots were removed and the flare of a match as with lighted cigaret the disturber retired. At each arrival Vic almost rose and shouted of the benefaction of the carnival management; but only the thought that possibly he might be compelled somehow to return that part of the money over and above the four dollars he had actually lost in the Lucas tent stayed his voice.

At sunrise he stole out and ate a hearty breakfast at a near-by lunch-room, offering one of the twenties in payment.

Now, at the Elite lunch-counter any bill over two dollars was regarded with suspicion. Patrons of the Elite usually paid in small change.

The proprietor accepted Vic's twenty gingerly. He took it to the front window and bent over it solicitously. He shook his head sadly.

"No good," he stated, languidly passing the bill back to Vic.

"No good!"

Vic hooked his high boot-heels in the rungs and raised two feet off the stool.

"No good! Why—why, see them hairs in it? 'Course it's good——"

"Those hairs are just printed on it," enlightened the proprietor of the Elite.

"Printed *on*. Can't be!"

Vic peered anxiously at the bill. He even tore a mite off the corner. One at a time he unearthed the other two and subjected them to the same scrutiny. He rumpled them and blew on them and bit at them. Still the fact remained; in the light of day close inspection revealed them counterfeit.

Vic was appalled. It made him sick at the stomach. He had given ten good dollars to get those three counterfeit twenties. Despairingly he left the counter.

"I gotta go borrow sixty cents to pay you with," he explained.

He awoke Charley File and negotiated the loan.

"That's two bucks yuh owe me," old Charley reminded him. "Dollar forty I lent yuh yist'day an' sixty now. Yuh owe the Palace ten on yer saddle, too."

Old Charley's head was a good ledger.

Vic actually went back and paid for his breakfast; that shows how stunned he was by the discovery that his twenties were faithless. But within the hour he evolved a plan. He would wait until the big rush to the contest events was on and he would go in and enter, paying with his twenties, and receive ten good dollars in change.

His plan proved feasible. There was a great rush of contestants to get their names down at about the eleventh hour and Vic was in the midst of the jam. The registration official at contest headquarters was swamped. Ropers, riders, cowboys of all sorts, were in a hurry to get their names down before the entry books were closed at noon. So it was an easy matter for Vic to make his entries and pay for them with the three twenties to the official in charge, to whom large bills were accepted as the usual thing.

Vic received a good ten in change. Then he left the place. He left the crowds and slipped out to the contest grounds and hid among the piles of baled hay stored there for the feeding of the roping-cattle and wild horses used in the events.

Vic Tipps heard the grandstand filling with spectators, but he did not look out from his hiding-place. He was uncomfortably aware that he had passed counterfeit money. Vic expected the sheriff.

He crouched in hiding and heard the band as it marched through the principal streets at the head of the cowboy parade, but still he did not show his head. He heard the whooping of the cowboys as they entered the grounds and the applause of the spectators as the standing Roman races swept around the colorful arena in the opening spectacle, but his ears were all attuned for the voice of Sheriff David or the crunch of that worthy's heavy boot-heel approaching the bales of hay.

It was not until he heard the voice of the arena director: "Bronc Riders ready. Bustin' contes' next," that he ventured timidly from his nook. Expecting every moment to feel the heavy hand of the law on him, he furtively begged the loan of a saddle from an acquaintance and when his turn came mounted a tense-muscled black. Vic was beginning to hope that his lawlessness had not been discovered, but he thought he detected sly looks and whispered words among his friends. Possibly, he reasoned, it was imagination.

Just then his helpers released the black demon upon which he was seated. The black wheeled clean about, squealing, and went off in a series of crooked, arching jumps. Vic was usually a pretty good rider, but that day he felt himself getting a trifle behind. He could ride to the top of each leap without difficulty but in the coming down he found himself arriving there just a split second after the horse.

As the horse shot back up he met Vic coming down. That little collision resulted in Vic's going just a bit higher on the ensuing rise than was his wont and the next time he came down the bobbing saddle met him half-way. There followed an impact that could be heard to the nethermost parts of that grandstand. Then as Vic's spurs clicked together above the saddle-horn there was a roar from the spectators through which not even the discharge of a French seventy-five could be heard.

Vic hit the dust so far away from the black that it seemed incredible he had ever been on the beast at all. Amid the glee of the crowd he scurried around behind the corrals and thence to his hiding-place among the bales.

Well, he hadn't been arrested. That was some relief, he thought. Most likely they'd never learn who passed the counterfeit twenties. Vic even went so far as to peek over the bales and see some of the other boys ride the broncs. And by the time they got around to the trick and fancy roping he was up, seated atop the rick, enjoying the show to the fullest extent.

"Next event, the bulldogging!"

The announcer's cry came almost welcome to Vic Tipps. With high hopes he mounted a borrowed horse and took his place. One by one he saw others ride out and grapple their steers with naked hands and throw them.

Then all at once he saw Sheriff David. He was conversing with a short stranger and seemed to be looking straight at Vic. But the sheriff was cock-eyed and Vic couldn't be sure. At least he appeared to be looking at Vic, and it was as the cold hand of death to Vic Tipps.

Finally his name was called. His blood was chilled with vague foreboding as he rode out.

The corral gate crashed open and a huge red steer galloped forth speeded by two whooping hazers. The starter's flag dropped and Vic mechanically clapped the spur to his eager little cow-pony. Swiftly he bore down upon the plunging steer. As his pony swept close he leaned out from the saddle and caught at the bobbing white horns.

Even as he did so he realized all was not well. Now in his hands, wet as they were with the perspiration of a guilty conscience, the horns were like two wriggling trout. It was too late to draw back, already he was out of the saddle and the pony was whipping on past. Vic clung there a moment, clawing at the steer's face.

Like a tramp missing his hold on a box-car he slipped down along the steer's side and went sprawling onto the hard earth. He heard but dimly the swelling roar of laughter from the grandstand as he rolled over and over. Then, staggering to his feet he, like the steer, galloped for the shelter of the baled hay in the feed-lot.

But Vic did not stop at the hay. He did not even pause. Fear and humiliation sat hard upon him. In his mind's eye he still had a clear picture of Sheriff David's weird eyes peering at him over the shoulder of the short stranger. He knew they were after him.

Giving no thought to his entry in the coveted steer-roping, he hurried onward to the fence. There he vaulted and loped as rapidly to the railroad yards, as high-heeled boots would permit. He had said he would sometime go elsewhere, and he felt that now was the appointed time.

And ten years later old Charley File saw Victor Vyne, movie-hero in "Heartbeats and Saddle-Leather," and recognized in him Vic Tipps.

OLD CHARLEY had been in California a week before the goings-on ceased to bewilder him. He was getting accustomed to seeing painted humans in odd attire, dancing-frocks and evening clothes, scurrying about at midday. He had ceased to peer if a troop of mounted cowboys, following a motor truck, passed his door at sunrise. Or to wonder at a group shooting pictures in the blaze of electric light at midnight.

What he had at first supposed to be splendid hotels proved to be merely residences of these same movie actors. At one of these palatial homes old Charley gazed long and earnestly at the camel in gay trappings that dozed, hitched to one of the pillars of the front porch. At another a beautiful girl, four monkeys and a man who looked like a monkey, munched candies on the rose-fragrant lawn. Again Charley saw a great automobile with three seats roll up to the curbing. The two flunkies in the front seat sat stiffly rigid while the two flunkies in the rear sprang to the doors to release the two passengers—a girl who reminded Charley of a perky little squirrel and a dapper male companion whose face reminded Charley of a wizened walnut-hull. They minced loftily across the few feet that separated the car from the awninged entrance to their palace.

The homes were growing more imposing as old Charley File hobbled along, his high-heeled boots thudding strangely on the palm-shaded cement walks. But he kept on, for he was nearing the home of Victor Vyne.

He referred to the scrap of paper he carried in his hand. There could be no mistake. The next place was Vic's. The great white building with the many porches, the pergolas, the castellated chimneys, the awninged and long windowed sun-rooms, the orange-trees and rose-bowered lawn—this was the home of Victor Vyne, old Vic Tipps!

Charley File's heart beat high as he approached the place. He began to wonder if his little scheme was going to work after all His boot-heels clumped oftener and his high beaver bobbed faster and faster as his choppy strides bore him toward the palace. On his face was the grim look that used to be there when, in the days of his bronc-busting youth, he was saddling an especially bad one.

A flight of wide stone steps led to the terraced lawn. At the foot of the steps stood what Charlie mentally catalogued as a double-barreled automobile, it being one with two wind-shields and but half a top. A uniformed Japanese sat at the wheel and another, his duplicate, stood at attention by the door of the tonneau.

Down the steps came sniffily two persons; one, a girl so delicate of figure and coloring as to appear made of wax, and the other a gentleman, counterpart of the men's clothing advertisements old Charley had seen in the papers. He halted and eyed them keenly. Neither deigned to notice him.

"Howdy."

Charley File stepped politely forward.

"I hope I'm not intrudin' too much. But 't seems like I know yuh. Ain't yuh ol' V-v——"

The words died on old Charley's eager lips. The lady had not turned her head nor changed her expression in the least. The gentleman had moved on exactly as if nothing were being said, merely turning his head slightly in old Charley's direction in a stiff, cold stare. Old Charley was chagrined, and at a loss what to do.

A moment more and the couple had entered their car. The Japanese snapped shut the door and leaped to his place by the driver. With a muffled whirr the car glided forward.

Old Charley File was not one to be lightly turned aside from his purpose. He was sixty, but erect and active. His face bore in a calm, unassertive way the stamp of stubborn patience born of many years' handling obstinate horses. Just now he clutched at the silver-plated supports of the second wind-shield and leaped to the running-board.

"Hey, ain't you Vic Tipps?" he blurted, poking his head in under the trim top.

The lady gazed, oblivious to the disturbance, straight ahead, her delicate profile outlined sharply against the velvet lining of the top. Old Charley wondered if anything would jar her out of her calm. Her companion stared, vacantly surprized, at Charley. One of the Japanese was gliding from the front seat.

"Vic Tipps," demanded Charley crisply. "Has prosperity plumb petrified yer soul? Don't yuh know ol' Charley File?"

The gentleman seemed about to reply.

"Don't yuh remember Prescott? Charley snarled. "An' the Palace Livery Stable where——"

With that old Charley hit the pavement. The Japanese had done his work well. The big car stopped within four feet and backed swiftly. Charley scrambled to his feet.

The door of the tonneau flipped open and the gentleman leaped out.

"Of course I remember Prescott and the Palace Livery Stable," he was saying. "I didn't recognize you, Charley File."

He lowered his voice.

"How—how about it—back there—ah—about those three twenties?"

Old Charley finished shaking hands before he replied.

"So that's why yuh lit out and never let us hear fr'm yuh ag'in. We thought yuh's ashamed of the way yuh rode that black an' dogged that ox."

"I see. But was—was anything said about—about——"

"'Bout them counterfeit twenties? Shore, plenty. Sheriff David always did say he 'lowed you thought he's after you that day. But he wasn't. He'd picked up a lady the gover'ment detectives said was workin' off queer money, an' they wanted to see if yuh could be a witness ag'in her. Said th' rest'rant man's seen yuh with one. Several of th' boys had 'em, but nothin' was ever done but t' take it away from 'em an' make 'em testify at the trial."

"Well, I'll be——"

Vic Tipps paused. He mused a moment.

Then, "It was two bucks I borrowed off you, wasn't it, Charley?"

"Yep," assented Charley File. "Two bucks, and ten on the saddle."

Vic Tipps drew out two silver dollars and a bill.

"I want to send back what money I borrowed from the other boys, too."

"Thanks," said old Charley, accepting the money. "Wait a minute."

Getting to his knees on the pavement, he rolled out a pair of well-worn dice.

"Shoot yuh all or any part of 't," he urged.

Vic Tipps, gentleman, flopped to his knees.

"I'll go you," he breathed happily, reaching for the dice.

From the yellow-leather cushions of the tonneau came a faint stir. The lady screamed—a well-bred, discreet little scream, but a scream nevertheless.

"Good," grunted old Charley ungallantly.

"Go ahead," Vic called to her, intent on shaking the cubes in his cupped hands. "We'll come along later."

The car, with almost imperceptible sound, moved off. Vic Tipps and Charley File knelt on the clean pavement, the dice merrily galloping between them.

* * *

NEXT morning old Charley took his first ride in an automobile. The car was his own. And what a car! A thing of wondrous lines and power; of yellow-leather upholstery. Vic Tipps was showing old Charley how to drive it, for it belonged to Charley now.

For once in his life old Charley had abandoned the boots and high beaver. He wore the suit Vic Tipps had worn the day before. On his feet were Vic's expensive shoes; on his head was Vic's neat fedora; in his pockets were Vic's roll, watch and handkerchief—everything. The ivories had been good to Charley File.

Same old Vic.

COMANCHE OF CUSTER'S COMMAND

by Earl H. Emmons

TWO days after Custer's tragic struggle in the Little Big Horn, men of Reno's command found a member of the Seventh Cavalry standing in a near-by creek, his body full of bullets and arrows and his soul full of wrath against the Redskin. The survivor was Comanche, the horse of Captain Keogh. He was rescued and taken to Fort Lincoln, where Colonel Sturgis issued the following order:

Headquarters 7th U. S. Cavalry,
Fort Lincoln, D. T., G. O. No. 7.

(1) The horse known as Comanche, being the only living representative of the bloody tragedy of the Little Big Horn June 25, 1876, his kind treatment and comfort shall be a matter of special pride and solicitude on the part of every member of the Seventh Cavalry, to the end that his life be preserved to the utmost limit. Wounded and scarred as he is, his very existence speaks in terms more eloquent than words, of the desperate struggle against overwhelming numbers, of the hopeless conflict and the heroic manner in which all went down to death on that fatal day.

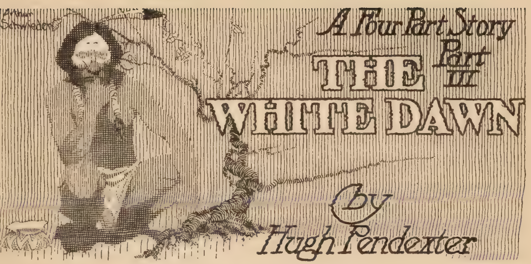
(2) The Commanding Officer of Company I will see that a special and comfortable stable is fitted for him, and he will not be ridden by any person whatsoever, under any circumstances, nor will he be put to any kind of work.

(3) Hereafter, upon all occasions of ceremony of mounted regimental formation, Comanche, saddled, bridled and draped in mourning, and led by a mounted trooper of Company I, will be paraded with the regiment.

By command of Col. Sturgis.

E. A. Garlington,
First Lieutenant and Adjutant, 7th Cavalry.

Comanche remained at Fort Lincoln until 1879, when, with the Seventh Cavalry, he was transferred to Fort Meade, S. D. He lived here ten years, then was taken to Fort Riley, Kans., where he died. He was buried with full military honors.



A Four Part Story

Part III

THE WHITE DAWN

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "A Bearer of Belts," "Wolf Law," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WE HAD been thoroughly licked the year before on Long Island, and the English, under General Howe, held New York. St. Leger with regulars and Indians was getting ready to pour down the Mohawk, and General Burgoyne's army had already crossed the Canadian frontier intending to sweep across Lake Champlain and Lake George to Albany.

There seemed little doubt that Howe would push north to join him. But there was a doubt!

To help clear up this point General Arnold sent me—Sergeant Cleve Morgan—to New York, disguised as Ambrose Kerry, whose relatives, Madame Betworth and Miss Audrey Betworth, had been captured with their maid, Betsy Osmond, in New Jersey, where I had been serving under Captain Sant.

Though there was a noose around my neck, I didn't have much difficulty, upon reaching Manhattan, in making the acquaintance of Captain Saleby, a flippant young officer of the king, and Paul Bowen, a sober-minded refugee. But I was disturbed to find that the men I wanted to get in touch with had vanished. Berce, the most important, was in prison.

At Madame Betworth's, the old colored servant, Socrates, received me without open suspicion; but before I had been there a day I discovered Betsy Osmond, the maid, stealing into the house in boy's clothing—and I believed the game was up. Fortunately she did not recognize me in my wig and silks, and through the feather-brained Saleby I was still able to get in touch with Berce, and receive this vital information:

"Philadelphia by fleet!"

In delivering the information the patriot Berce was killed; and I remained the only living American who could tell General Washington that Howe would not join Burgoyne at Albany!

But I still had a part to play; and I was obliged to visit Howe's headquarters with Saleby to request a commission. Among Saleby's friends I planned a party that night at the Betworths' country place at Bloomingdale which would enable me to make my escape northward. Unfortunately I also aroused the hostility of Colonel Wentsel, of the Hessian troops.

This would not have bothered me, except that he informed us the lines had been closed, and my party must accordingly be called off. Mother Baff, the old hag informer who had followed me on my arrival in Manhattan, had informed headquarters of the presence of an important spy.

My situation was made even more dangerous by the report that my supposed cousin, Captain Jasper Betworth, was expected in the city at any hour. On top of this a note was mysteriously handed me in the tavern, signed by an old comrade from my own squad:

"Git out—Bucks."

I went immediately to the Betworths' house, and found Bucks himself waiting for me, the reckless fellow having made his way into the city as a rebel deserter. I told him the news briefly, and he went out to a friend's to procure some country clothes for us.

During his absence Betsy Osmond again appeared at the house, but this time I captured her. With great courage she boldly declared me an impostor—though she did not recognize me as the Colonial sergeant of the Jerseys—and said that the real Ambrose Kerry had arrived in New York. Then, as I tried to recover some papers she had thrown into the open fire, she shot at me, knocking off my wig. Instantly she cried out:

"You! You! Now I know you!"

At that moment there came a knocking at the door. Out went the lights. I was trapped by the newcomer, and fought for my life. Bucks returned as I went crashing to the floor. Betsy Osmond had fled. But as a light flashed up we both discovered that my assailant was our old commander, Captain Sant—an English spy—and English troops were already at the door to take us.

All would have been over for us if Sant hadn't rushed out of the room, straight into the arms of the guard. Mistaking him for me the soldiers beat him down, and dragged him away, a prisoner.

We were now in danger of imminent discovery.

"The White Dawn," copyright, 1922, by Hugh Pendexter.

Bucks convinced me that the boldest course was the best; and we went forth and actually enlisted as soldiers of the king.

"Injun trick," said Bucks. "Just hidin' where they'd never expect to find us."

But, though this was true of officials, it didn't apply to the old witch, Baff, who was still at our heels; and we discovered further that we had had the vile luck of having joined Captain Sant's own company. Just as our ruin seemed certain, the old woman was murdered by thieves. However, in our present position discovery was inevitable; so we slipped away and started our perilous escape to the northward.

Now that we had started open flight, the search for us became a chase, and toward the northern end of Manhattan, among woods and farms, Bucks and I separated. Several times when on the verge of capture I escaped miraculously.

Once with the English at my heels I rushed into a barn—straight into the arms of the old Betworth servant—Socrates!

To my amazement he found me a hiding-place in the attic of the old mansion. As I sat there in the dark going over events in my mind and figuring out my chances of reaching King's Bridge and escaping into Westchester, two fatigued strangers were brought mysteriously into the room by Socrates.

We could not see each other and we did not dare converse—since English officers had taken their quarters in the house for the night—until it was almost daylight, when we made our way out into the open. As we came into the clear road, the first streaks of day were lighting our way. I turned to look at my companions.

The older was Paul Bowen, the man I had met when I first came into Manhattan. That was surprize enough; but when I looked more intently at the other, I was staggered.

It was Betsy Osmond!

Betsy Osmond, also a patriot and a spy! To my own peril was now added the peril that hung over this brave but exhausted woman.

THE sun was up when I crawled from the shack and through the alders. I advanced until I could see the post-road. There was no sight, nor sound of horsemen. If Wentsel's orders had been carried out there would be an ambush a short distance to the north, where all passers-by would be halted did they lack the king's livery.

Retreating a dozen rods from the road I advanced parallel to it, keeping on my hands and knees to take advantage of the scattering low bushes. Before I could locate any sentinels marking the dead line a pistol shot and a woman's scream turned me back to the hidden shack. Without pausing to reflect it was my duty to save myself and thereby do a great service to all Americans I jumped to my feet and ran to serve one American, a young woman dressed in boy's clothes.

When I neared the thicket of alders I heard the trampling of horse's hoofs and the thick, guttural cries of a man enraged to the point of murder. I did not hear the woman's voice a second time. When I came into full view of the thicket it was to behold Colonel Wentsel astride of a plunging horse, a pistol in one hand, a sword in the other. On the edge of the alders before the shack, and lying face down, was the body of Paul Bowen.

From the passivity of his body I knew he was dead. It was only by following the horseman's maneuvers that I discovered the maid. She had taken refuge in a second clump of alders, and Wentsel was trying to force his horse into these. The animal was high-strung and balked each time he was spurred forward. Just as I was comprehending what had happened Wentsel howled an oath and hurled his long pistol at the slender figure crouching low behind the sapling growth. Then the infuriated man sent his horse crashing sidewise into the thicket for a few feet and leaning from the saddle attempted to slash the terrified girl with his sword.

I shouted for him to stop his devilish work. He swung his horse about and on seeing me grimaced like a fiend and jumped his mount toward me. Off in the west men were shouting, and I knew it would not be long before he had reenforcements. As he tore down upon me and slashed at my neck I ducked and gained the edge of the maid's refuge.

To those not yet in sight he yelled:

"Come on! I've got the whole nest of them!"

I tried to get the girl's attention, to penetrate her understanding, in an effort to have her run for it while I kept Wentsel busy. But she was so intent on staring at the form of Bowen I doubt if she realized my presence. Then I had to shift my position as the colonel swept around the thicket, a second holster pistol raised high in place of the sword. I dived behind some berry-bushes and remembered that I, too, had pistols. When I came to my feet he was almost upon me, his horse rearing high, with patches of foam flying from his mouth. The colonel fired and I let drive with a Highland pistol. He struck the ground almost as soon as his rearing charger's hoofs smacked down. I seized the bridle and fought for a moment to bring the brute under control.

"Betsy Osmond! Oh, Betsy Osmond! Come! Come!" I cried.

Even after she had stared at me for a moment she could not seem to understand how the brutal colonel could disappear and Morgan, the sergeant, be standing in his place.

"Come!" I called again.

"Mr. Bowen?" she panted as she crept from the thicket.

"Dead, I think. Soldiers are coming."

She trembled violently and sobbed—

"The brute shot him down without a word. Shot him from behind!"

"I know! I know!" I said, tossing her upon the horse. "Hold this beast for a second. I ran to Bowen and searched his clothing and secured a thick package of papers and thrust them inside my coat. Then I ran to Wentsel and secured the pistol still clutched in his right hand. My bullet had caught him in the middle of his forehead. The cries of the men, trying to locate us, now sounded louder. Leaping onto the horse I threw an arm around the girl's slim waist and struck out for the highway.

"The cloak!" she exclaimed, tilting her head to look at me.

She referred to the colonel's military cloak which he had thrown back. I was sitting on it. As I worked it out from under me and got it over my shoulders I noticed it was wet with dew, and I knew he had been hunting us throughout the night. Now I wished I had had time to secure his hat and boots. Still in the early morning the most conspicuous point in our appearance as we dashed into the road was the long cloak. In noticing that, one would not at first observe the lack of boots and proper headgear.

I praised Betsy Osmond for thinking of it even as I was bringing the voluminous folds about her. At a distance we must have resembled a portly Hessian officer bent on serious business. As we clattered along the highway I saw two groups of soldiers running from the north and making toward the shack. These would be some of the men detailed to hold the line from the road to the Jones farm. These must have included all men posted on the road itself, for we were not hailed.

"Can we ride right through?" asked the girl.

"Only good for part of the way," I answered. The next moment we were passing the branch road leading to the Harlem river and three soldiers were springing from the bushes. They recognized the dragoon horse and noted the military cloak before I could get at my second pistol, and they instinctively slunk back. Before they could gather their wits we were by them. They did not venture to fire until we were nearly out of range, and then their shots came some seconds apart, as if they doubted the wisdom of their action.

"They'll be after us on the road soon," I told her. "We must quit the horse and take to whatever cover we can find and wait till night."

"Do as you think best," she listlessly replied. "I am useless. I have disgraced myself."

"You are wonderful! At the next bend we will dismount."

Ahead was the spire of a church, marking a little village. We were nearing a region of fields, dotted with homes of Dutch farmers. I pulled the horse down to a walk and leaped off. The girl slid to the ground. We were very open to discovery and my courage began to weaken. From the saddle-bag I procured a stock of powder and some bullets for the long pistol, also a flask of brandy. The road was empty in both directions, and the shade-trees scattered along the borders shielded us somewhat from the gaze of any one abroad in the fields. But once we were sighted it was a poor place in which to seek cover. The maid studied my face and must have read despair there, for she pointed to a thick stand of maples at one side, the foliage of which was unusually thick. "They'll be looking for us far from the road once they find the horse," she said. "They'll search every farm. Let's get up into the trees."

It was audacious, and therefore worthy of consideration. Had there been a chance to double back I gladly would have taken it. After a moment's thought I agreed. "Back on the horse. I'll lead him under the branches to save you from barking the trunk."

Soon she was snugly perched in a big maple with the military cloak folded for a cushion. I led the horse back to the middle of the road and sent him galloping on down the highway. Pausing only to obliterate the hoof marks near the tree I shinned up into the heart of the foliage and made a careful selection of a crotched limb and arranged my belt for a back-rest. We had no food, and what was worse, all the wishing in the world wouldn't turn the bottle of brandy into water.

My first task was to reload Wentsel's pistol and my own brace. I had barely finished doing this when Betsy clutched my wrist. A dozen mounted men were thundering up the road intent on following the tracks of the dragoon horse. Foot-soldiers would soon be streaming after them. I saw them coming and after they had passed and had proceeded a bit up the road; but when they were beneath us they were invisible. They were some of the light horse and not any of Wentsel's command.

After an hour elapsed we learned that roosting in a tree is most irksome. The constant fear that some careless movement might agitate the foliage and advertise our position, and the physical discomfort of maintaining the same posture became unendurable. To remain there until nightfall was utterly out of the question. I had much time to study Betsy Osmond, and her wan face aroused my deepest pity.

The pathos of her drooping mouth and the boy's clothes made her appear to be very young and helpless, no taller than a twelve-year-old lad. When she spoke it was in a tremulous whisper. I told her we must change our plans and risk descending. She rewarded my decision with a warm smile, but before I could swing down from my perch we were startled by the sound of a bell. Around the bend at the south straggled a cow. Behind her came others, a dozen in all. These were driven by a rustic, fully as disreputable in appearance as I. The cattle were inclined to stray from the road and the cowherd's progress was slow. Before the herd reached our tree a company of light infantry came up behind it, marching briskly. The coming of the soldiers sent the cattle into the fields. The officer questioned the rustic and was informed that the cattle were being driven a few miles beyond King's Bridge, whereat he ordered his men to drive them back to the road. This thoughtfulness was not prompted solely by a desire to accommodate the cowherd, for once the cows were returned the officer wrote on a piece of paper and handed it to the rustic, saying:

"Give this message to any mounted officer you meet. Don't let your cattle stray and take you away from the road."

The rustic put the paper in his hat and promised to deliver it at the first opportunity. The soldiers were split into two bands, one for each side of the road, and ordered to search the countryside closely and to a considerable distance, the officer going with the detachment assigned to the east side of the road. During this business the maid had trembled until I feared she would betray us. I scarcely dared to breathe until the last red coat had quit the road and the officer was hurrying to take the eastern end of his line.

The cowherd lost all ambition for haste and seated himself in the shade and attempted to read the message. The scrap of paper became of vast importance to me. I saw in it a passport, a safe-conduct; and being directly over the fellow I dropped down upon him, flattening him to the ground. The girl gave a little cry, and I called for her to be calm. I remained where I had landed—on top of the cowherd—until satisfied my mishap had not been observed from the fields. Then I got hold of the fellow's throat and drew him to one side. There was no necessity for choking him, as he was unconscious.

I CALLED to the girl to come down, and bring the cloak and belt. With strips torn from the cloak I secured the fellow's hands and feet, and with a stick and more of the cloak improvised a gag. By the time he opened his eyes he was snugly tucked from view behind a small clump of bushes some distance from the road.

"Did you kill him?" asked the girl as I returned to the tree.

I quieted her fears and recovered the note from the dust and opened it. It read:

> To any of His Majesty's mounted officers:
>
> Lieutenant Hopgood, 1st Infantry, reports the murder of Colonel Wentsel, heavy dragoons, by escaped spy. Lieutenant Hopgood has men on each side of the King's Road, working north and raking the fields and farms. (Signed) HOPGOOD.

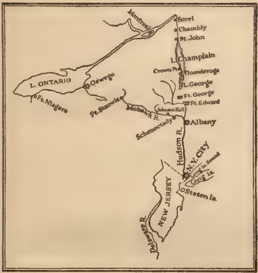
Cutting her a stick I picked up the cowherd's staff, and the two of us soon had the drove moving up the road at a far better pace than my victim had ever achieved.

The exhilaration of being afoot, of being free to move, gave me high spirits. Mistress Osmond's small face took on a new expression. With a sidelong glance she said—

"You are quite resourceful for a sergeant."

"You are very brave for a lady's maid," I rejoined. "If we meet any soldiers chase after a cow, keep in motion, don't let your hat fall off. And you'd better rub some dirt on that pretty face of yours."

She did so and also rubbed dirt on the backs of her small hands and on her wrists, but she refused to soil her slim throat, which showed soft and white above the coarse shirt. In such punctilios will the feminine mind indulge. To remedy the incongruous effect I had her tie her handkerchief snugly about her neck, albeit the day was over warm. For half a mile the cattle moved smartly, and then slowed up to a graze. A strong breeze came from the north, but lessened the heat none. It brought black clouds and the rumble of thunder. The maid walked close by my side and said—



"It will be a thunderstorm."

"The best thing we could ask for. Better than night," I rejoiced.

"I don't like the lightning," she confessed. A quaint contradiction. She dared everything in running the British lines, trusted to her nimble heels to escape from old Mother Baff's band, and was afraid of a thunderstorm.

"I'm sorry I tried to shoot you at the Betworth house," she suddenly said. "I was not myself. I am very sorry."

"Please don't remember it. You did perfectly right."

A blinding flash and a terrific explosion sent the cattle to crowding against each other. The maid pressed against my side and faltered—

"That struck near here!"

The rain began falling as if the bottom had been torn from some celestial lake. Puffs of dust rose under the bombardment for a bit, then the road became a lagoon. The fields steamed and objects were blurred at a short distance. I passed my arm around the maid to support her. We bowed against the cloudburst and almost before we knew it mounted men were splashing out of the leaden wall ahead. An officer almost rode us down and bellowed—

"Keep your cattle out of the way!"

I produced the message and handed it up to him. He had his cloak over his head just as my Oneida friend, the Tree-Breaker, wears his blanket when the weather is rough, and I glimpsed a hawklike face and gray mustaches as he bent over the writing. To the muffled figures back of him he roared:

"—'s mercy! Colonel Wentsel has been murdered by that cursed spy! Hopgood of the light infantry writes this. He has men out on each side of the road hunting for the blood-thirsty devil. Good thing. Too soft to take our horses into the fields. Forward!"

His stirrup hit me in the chest and sent me to one side as a courteous reminder to clear the way. They splashed by at a trot, each muffled pyramid of a man blind to their great chance. We drove our cattle through the little village during the downpour and saw no one abroad. By the time the storm cleared we had driven our cattle over the King's Bridge. Less than a year before I had passed that way and had witnessed the destruction of the small wooden structure by the retreating American army. Leaving the maid to herd the cows I went to the spacious two-story tavern near the Old Wading Place, kept by John Cock, and at the kitchen door bought some bread and cheese and a jug of fresh-drawn beer.

We were off the island and within seventeen miles of White Plains, and about the same distance from Tarrytown. The road through Wepperham was the most direct, allowing us to keep close to the river and cross at Dobb's Ferry if fortune favored us, or at Tarrytown above. Betsy was fair delighted and I had to caution her, or she would have burst into singing.

The storm was rushing out to sea and the island was drawing away from us, and her heart was high in knowing so much of danger had been avoided or overcome.

"It's you I have to thank," she earnestly said. "And to think how I talked to you at the farmhouse, and how you refused the journey-cake through pride. I was glad the other man came back and took it."

"That would be Bucks," I murmured.

So, still driving our weary cattle, we fared north while across the river General Washington's army waited at Ramapo to see which way Howe's army would jump; and we had the news which would set our army in motion.

CHAPTER VII

THE ARMY FALLS BACK

WE REACHED Ramapo without serious difficulties, and the maid vanished to find her mistress and procure suitable attire. I presented myself at headquarters only to learn that Bucks already had arrived with the news of Howe's sailing and that it was not necessary for General Washington to question me in person. I handed over poor Bowen's papers to an aide. From conversation with this officer I learned that anxiety over Howe's plans had lost some of its edge, being dulled by worry over Burgoyne's advance upon Ticonderoga with a magnificently equipped and superbly officered army.

Burgoyne had won renown in Portugal and all his staff and regimental officers were distinguished by their professional attainments. Even St. Luc de La Corne, in command of the Indian host, was the best of his kind and had no superior in audacity and ferocity. In truth, I heard more about this inhuman character than I did of the experienced Riedesel, the knightly Fraser, bold Lord Balcarras, the distinguished Phillips, or any of the other eminent officers with Burgoyne. Nor is this strange, for men talk of that which they hold in detestation, or fear. Burgoyne's officers were uniformly most courteous gentlemen; the partisan Indian leader was close kin to the devil.

It was early morning when we arrived at Ramapo and my business at headquarters was soon done. I wandered about the camp and the village and found soldiers and civilians gabbing wild stories, some of them to the effect that stout Ticonderoga had fallen. There was nothing to warrant these rumors, and I would have dismissed them as camp gossip if not for my friend, the aide, hunting me up shortly after the noon hour with orders for me to travel at post speed to Fort Edward, General Schuyler's headquarters, to learn the truth about conditions in the north.

I was to select a man to act as my messenger. The aide intimated that our commander was much disgruntled over the lack of definite information about the invading army's progress. At once I set about hunting for Bucks and, instead, encountered Miss Audrey Betworth on the outskirts of the village. She was walking with her maid. If possible she was more beautiful than ever. Had Parthenope possessed such charms no Ulysses could have passed her by.

I came to a halt and bared my head and stood like a yokel, hoping to hear her voice. She looked at me as though I were some strange kind of a bug, her gaze taking me in in passing. I hurried on down the rough road to be alone until I could recover my self-respect.

"I can not follow you any farther, Mr. Sergeant," a despairing voice called behind me.

It was Betsy Osmond, dressed and befrilled and as dainty as any flower. By some miracle she had lost all traces of fatigue, and her face dimpled mischievously as she read my sullen countenance.

"One may look at a queen but queens see nothing close to the ground," she bantered.

"What do I care? Naturally she hates me."

"Oh, no. That would be dignifying you. She would not more than *dislike* you if you were a colonel. I scarcely doubt if she has ever met any man of high enough station to merit her hate. And you're only an unknown sergeant."

"How happens she walks with you? When will you tell her what you've done?"

"She loves me. I've told her all," was the simple reply.

The thought of being loved by Audrey Betworth! It humanized her and made her even more wonderful. To be encompassed by Mistress Audrey's love was equivalent to being glorified. I gaped in awe at the little maid who seemed to accept the miracle so coolly.

"We don't think alike," she went on. "We make sacrifices for opposing forces. But she knows she can do nothing to stop me from loving her, and I have done nothing yet to kill her love. She is as good as she is beautiful."

A bit of doubt persisted in my mind as I recalled all the maid had done in New York. I intimated as much.

"Oh, I told her all," she quietly said. "We had a good cry together. Madame Betworth was severe with me, but after she has thought things over she is a very just woman. She said it was very friendly in me not to betray her kinsman while he was posing as Captain Sant. Mistress Audrey wept when I told her about my escape and the dangers. She petted me much. I've obtained permission for them to go to Albany. I've told such horrible stories about the plague that madame would not return to the city even if she could."

"What will she say when she knows you followed me?"

"She knows it now. I couldn't let you go without saying good-by, without thanking you, without saying again it was terrible of me to try to shoot you."

"Betsy Osmond, you're a marvelous little woman. You've dared more in one day than your icicle of a mistress would dare for George the Third in a lifetime."

She dropped me a courtesy and primly said—

"Nevertheless you're in love with the icicle."

"What foolishness, child!"

"I wouldn't be very 'marvelous' if I couldn't see that much. She spoke of you when I said I must speak with you."

"She did? She said what?"

"That some day you would be hung."

My dismay must have appealed to her sense of humor, for she laughed. Then suddenly becoming very grave she extended her hand, and said:

"We had a queer experience together. You proved yourself a good companion. My mistress sees things from a different angle. But it doesn't follow we must stop loving her."

"I've said nothing about love. I've seen her only twice."

"One need see her only once to love her," she sighed. "It might be well if men could control their love, for she will love but once."

"She loves now?"

"I don't know."

"And it's not for a sergeant in the American army to ask. Betsy Osmond, I am glad you followed me. It was kind of you. Now it's good-by. And, although I too go north, we may not meet again. But remember that I always think of you as the marvelous little woman."

"We may meet in Albany."

"I travel farther than Albany, and I start as soon as I find the man called Bucks."

With a nod of her pretty head she turned and hurried up the road. There was an oddness in her leave-taking which puzzled me. However, there were many things to think about besides Betsy Osmond, for within an hour I found Bucks. Thirty minutes thereafter we were mounted on excellent animals, armed with Deckhard rifles, and riding north.

As we rode through the war-weary countrysides Bucks told me his adventures. In short, he had managed to reach King's Bridge ahead of the alarm and had had no trouble in crossing the river and making Ramapo. But it was not until we had reached Albany that we had talked ourselves out, for he needs must hear my story.

We began observing conditions and the mood of the people. Tryon county, that vast region containing all the settlements west and southwest of Schenectady, was boiling with terror. We did not need to ascend the Mohawk to learn that much. Men and women pouring into Albany supplied the information. From their testimony it was plain that the settlers along the Mohawk were eager for the strongest alliance, be it American or British; this because of their outlying position and their exposure to Indian raids.

Even the friendly Oneidas, now camped close to Schenectady, were uneasy; for they knew the Mohawks, Keepers of the Eastern Door, were coming under Joseph Brant along with Barry St. Leger's army and that there would be a bloody reckoning. From Oriskany, German Flats, Palatine and Schoharie the committees of safety were sending frantic messages to General Schuyler, all bespeaking pessimism.

The spirit of the people was pusillanimous, charged one report; persons of influence were betraying America, accused another. Both regulars and militia in the valley seemed to be almost paralyzed with fear; or at least they were not displaying the qualities expected from soldiers and citizens. These conditions were the more disturbing because they had not been expected; for Tryon county early in the war had taken the lead in emphasizing loyalty to the new republic.

Bucks viewed all this as being more serious in the telling than in the fact. Stripped of his idioms he believed that just before the arrival of any test of strength there are certain phases of nervousness to be gone through with. He confidently held that the average man steadies down to his work and does it well once he finds the crisis upon him.

"After they've been well blooded they'll do fine," he insisted.

I soon discovered another trend of thought which disturbed me keenly and which could not be explained away, or mitigated by the rifleman's philosophy. This was a growing hostility toward General Schuyler. The command of the Northern department had from the beginning been a political prize, with Congress stupidly shifting generals as fast as an aspirant could develop more political strength than was possessed by the incumbent.

In Schuyler's case I traced his ill fortune to New England's prejudice against New York; and the cause could be sought far back in colonial days, being expecially noticeable during the French war.

I drew up my impressions in the form of a letter and went to the flats above the town to find a soldier to be detailed as my messenger. The intelligence was not of sufficient importance to be despatched by Bucks; nor did the rifleman have any inclination to ride south. While we were jogging through the outskirts of the town we were compelled to slow down by a group of excited citizens blocking the road. As we were skirting these a man wildly yelled:

"Good ——! They've took Ticonderoga!"

I REACHED down and caught the fellow by the scruff of the neck and shook him soundly, and warned: "No more of that, or we'll give you a taste of the lash. St. Clair holds Ticonderoga, the strongest fort in America. He can hold it against all the red backs England can send. To say otherwise is treason."

The man wrenched himself free and rubbed his neck and sullenly replied:

"Go shake him who brought the word, mister soldier. There's no talk about it being took by assault. Mebbe they shot silver bullets ag'in the walls and Sinclair picked 'em up."

"You low scum!" roared Bucks, and he would have ridden him down had I not seized his bridle.

The offender drew back into the crowd. A woman shrilly cried:

"You ain't our bosses. If the fort ain't took why'd they send a Injun runner down here to skeer folks for?"

"Where's the runner?" I demanded, anxious to prevent the silly tale from causing a panic.

"Under the trees in my orchard gitting his wind back," spoke up a citizen. "He's run from Stillwater with nary a stop, I guess."

I tossed my reins to Bucks and dismounted and followed the direction the citizen pointed out. The little mob tagged after me; but I soon discouraged this attendance. I soon came to the Indian, a powerfully built chap, lying face down, his shoulders rising and falling as he charged his lungs with air. He was naked except for his breech-clout and paint bag.

"My brother has run far," I said in the Oneida tongue.

"Running did not tire him. It was the heavy burden he carried, my brother, the White One," he replied without lifting his head.

I knew him then to be the Tree Breaker, my old friend. I sat beside him and lighted my pipe and placed it in his outstretched hand. Slowly his fingers closed on the stem, and rolling on his side he puffed to the sky and earth. The figure of a bear, sitting on its haunches, the paws resting on a tree trunk, was freshly painted on the bronzed chest. I reached out my hand and he pressed it warmly and passed the pipe to me, and I smoked to his wind gods, and the sun and the earth.

"Many sleeps from now, after the Tree Breaker has run his last race, his grave shall be surrounded with red and white and black sticks, with a big opening at the foot, as becomes a great chief of the Oneidas," I said. "His white brother's heart is glad to see him. His brother is ready to take the heavy burden from his shoulders."

He slowly rose to a sitting posture, and I shouted to Bucks to bring my blanket; for it is not seemly that a man, mighty among his own people, should be gaped at like a bear at a baiting. Bucks could not leave the horses and sent the blanket by the owner of the orchard. I dismissed the man and carefully draped it about my friend. Never in all my life had I realized the precious value of minutes as I did while waiting to take the burden from his shoulders; no, not even when my life hung in the balance on the island of Manhattan. Yet I could not request him to tell his news, and when he did speak it would be much in figures.

A half a minute passed, then he said:

"My brother shall help carry the burden. Ticonderoga is too heavy for one to carry. It falls to the ground. It is in the dirt. Dust rises and hides the stars."

"There must have been enough blood to stop the dust."

He stared blankly at the circle of citizens for another thirty seconds, then said—

"There was no blood."

It was horrible. It was incredible. Ticonderoga, the impregnable gate against invasion, captured without a struggle!

"Some evil bird told foolish stories to my brother of the Bear clan."

Apparently he did not hear me. I waited, knowing I would receive my answer. At last he said:

"The Oneida saw the red stars fall from the mountain. He saw the long house of the white chiefs burn like dry grass. The Americans crossed the lake in the middle of the night. That is all."

"Why did you bring your burden here?"

"I could not lay it down at Fort Edward. General Schuyler was not there."

"I must send the talking paper to the great white chief. How many sleeps ago did my brother see this?"

He held up two fingers, which would place the undreamed-of catastrophe on July fifth.

"Wait for me here. I ride north and want a chief at my side. I have a brave soldier waiting for me. I will send him south with the paper. If I can not have a chief I must go into the woods alone."

His chest expanded, the blanket fell around his loins, and as his head went back his mouth opened to sound the terrific war-cry of the Oneidas, the Elder Brothers. And I knew I would fare well for a traveling companion. My next task was very disagreeable, for I must sadly disappoint a very brave man. I returned to my horse and procured paper from the saddle-flap and hastily wrote my second message, telling the evil tidings the Oneida had brought, and vouching for his honesty and his devotion to the American cause. Addressing this to General Washington I handed it to Bucks and simply said:

"I have found my messenger. Go!"

"Sarge! Sarge! You don't mean it. You couldn't do it!" he pleaded.

"Ticonderoga has fallen without making any resistance. I will trust no man in the north to ride with that news but you."

"Oh, ——! And we thought the critters was talking foolishness! Old Ti took! No fighting? Then by the Eternal, British gold did what British lead couldn't ever do!" And the brave fellow began to blubber like a heart-broken child.

"Will Bucks! Will Bucks!" I grieved. "You will unnerve me. Get this to General Washington as soon as possible. God help us, else this will end the war!"

"—— help any one that tries to hinder me going south. For if I must go I'll streak it; and I'm coming back a-hooting."

With that he wheeled his horse and dashed away on his hundred-mile ride.

I hastened back to the Oneida. He had withdrawn deeper into the orchard, and something in his bearing had discouraged the curious from following him. When I came upon him he was seated before a small trade-mirror, painting his face. He did not take any notice of me, and I knew I was not wanted while he oiled and painted for war.

I went back to my horse and during the period of waiting found time to analyze my feelings, the more fully to comprehend the extent of the disaster. It was useless to ask the Oneida for details. In his own time and with much figurative embellishment he would reveal the truth more fully. Evidently the fort had been fired upon from some height. But Ticonderoga was supposed to be impregnable. If so, why were not all the surrounding heights fortified?

I was to learn later that the supposedly storm-proof works were poorly manned; that instead of a garrison of five thousand there was but half that number of Continental troops, including nine hundred raw militia. Many of the latter were scarcely more than boys. None of them was adequately armed. One third of the garrison was unfit for duty. It would later come out that in attempting to strengthen the defenses, St. Clair, recently appointed as fort commandant, had over-extended the works and had left Sugar Loaf Hill (Mt. Defiance) and Mount Hope unoccupied. It was from these two positions, and especially from Sugar Loaf that the British had raked the fort.

Gates was originally appointed to command at Ticonderoga, but his jealousy of Schuyler caused him to refuse, thus delaying the work of putting the fort in a proper state of defense. But all this was for me to learn on some tomorrow. I knew the news was true, and I leaned against my horse, my heart and head both low as I traced the advance of the evil tidings up the hill and through the town. God knows we had feared the worst when we learned of the three-fold movement of Burgoyne, St. Leger and Howe. Even with Howe out of the campaign there was but one chance of preventing Burgoyne from reaching Albany, and that was to cut his line of supplies before he reached the hill town and could levy upon the New Hampshire Grants and the Mohawk valley.

"My brother makes a new war medicine?" courteously asked the Tree Breaker.

I jerked up my head and endeavored to smile, ashamed to show emotion before one who was bound to construe it as an unmanly weakness.

"My medicine is strong. It shows very red inside my eyes. We shall find much fighting in the woods. I hear there are some western Indians with the English."

He had painted the upper half of his face white and the lower half red. From the roots of his scalp-lock to his chin he had drawn long marks to represent scratches left by a bear's claw and had cunningly colored the marks red on the white background and black against the red. There were no women, nor children to be seen after the Oneida emerged from the orchard. With much contempt he said:

"There are some cowardly dogs of Sioux, Sacs, Foxes, Menominees, Chippewas, Winnebagoes, Ottawas, Mohawks and Abnaki."

Then more thoughtfully he added:

"The Mohawks will make a good fight. The Ottawas are very big men, but there is much water in their blood. They do not like to fight as well as they like to drink rum and burn prisoners. Because I am from the Bear People I will crush one dead with my arms."

"Your *orenda* is mighty—St. Luc de La Corne leads those Indians."

"A black snake leads them. He may be called as my brother says. There is an old Frenchman with them who is a big warrior. He led the fight against Braddock. He led the Miami and western Indians when they killed the soldiers in Fort William Henry. He must be a very cunning old man. His head would be better than many scalps."

This would be Charles de Langlade. In the French and Indian war he had counted some mighty coups. But St. Luc was the leader. He became a British subject after France lost Canada. He offered to sell himself and his savage following to Montgomery, when the expedition of 'Seventy-six promised to result in victory. He was distrusted by both Sir Guy Carleton and Montgomery, and when our general captured Montreal he refused to include the perfidious wretch in the capitulation.

Such a treacherous man would quit the British the moment he believed they were making a losing fight. Alas, there was small likelihood of his seeking other employment, now that Ticonderoga had fallen. It was enough to make heathen gods laugh to behold this cruel turn-coat serving the British on the very ground he had reddened with the blood of hundreds of British soldiers in the old war. He would need to take many American scalps before he could equal his string of British hair. Yet he was an educated man, a courtier by instinct, artful and ambitious.

I told the Oneida I would get him a horse, and he replied—

"The Bear who breaks down trees has a horse."

* * *

I SWUNG into the saddle and took the road for Fort Edward, fifty miles way. Tree Breaker trotted at my stirrup, apparently none the worse for his recent exertions. The news of Ticonderoga's fall had been spread by couriers, or fugitives by this time, and the road to the Mohawk crossing was dotted with men and women and children, riding south in carts, on horseback, or plodding along afoot, as though the red terror would pounce upon them at any moment. Many of these hurled questions at us, although we were making for and not from the zone of danger. Others urged us to turn back. And there were others who said nothing, but hurried on, their gaze never quitting the open road, their every thought and energy bent on reaching Albany town.

Birds might sing and the July sun distil sweet odors from the grass fields, but for these fugitives there was nothing in the world except stark horror and the implacable axes of St. Luc de La Corne's painted men. I endeavored to learn fresher news from some of these fleeing settlers. I was told that Ticonderoga had been burned and the entire army massacred, that Skenesborough was in ashes as well as the settlements in the New Hampshire Grants, and that even Bennington had been sacked and fearful toll of blood and prisoners taken. That Fort Ann and Fort Edward had fallen without striking a blow in defense was also wofully proclaimed.

"Schuyler's gone over to the red coats! He sold hisself!" cried a woman in a cart.

"Shut up! If he has it shows his sense," growled her hulking mate. "We're all for the king up here anyway. We ain't nothing to be afeared off from Gineral Burgoyne's Indians." As he spoke he cast a frightened glance over his shoulder. Ten miles beyond the mouth of the Mohawk the Oneida left me for a short time and when he returned he was mounted and leading a second horse for me to ride. I shifted my saddle to this fresh mount and turned my weary nag into the fields to graze.

"The roads are filled with little devil-birds that make men's hearts turn white by singing about bloody axes. Ho! The Tree Breaker and the White One are Keepers of the Road. They will make the western Indians run back to Canada," he chanted.

I did not deny the heroic rôle he imputed to me. To have informed him I was bent solely on learning the truth about our army's defeat would have been interpreted by him as a reflection on his veracity; and I would have seen my old friend no more. We were on the outskirts of Stillwater when the Oneida went for his horse, and now we encountered the first fugitives from the east side of the river, a bateau filled with women and children and handled by two men.

"Why do you come over here?" I asked one of the men. He did not answer. Both seemed to have lost their wits. One of the women replied:

"The Injuns are burnin' an' sculpin' on the Hoosic. We got away just in the nick o' time."

"That can't be," I told her. "No Indians are as far south as this. There has been a fight at Ticonderoga. The American army is between you and the savages."

"The American army? Ha! Ha!" hysterically yelled another woman, who was carrying a baby at her breast. "They're burnin' every farm on the Hoosic. Before sunup this mornin' we could hear 'em screechin' like panthers. The American army is all dead, or hidin' in the Grants."

This was arrant nonsense, of course. I translated it to the Tree Breaker, who understood English fairly well only when it was slowly spoken.

"They saw the red paint of the sun. They heard wolves howling. They are very foolish," he observed, disdaining to glance at the little group again.

We left them to take up their flight south after my suggestion that they stick to their boat and float down the river had been rejected. They were out of their reason with fear, and instinct drove them to keep near cover.

Beyond Stillwater we halted and the Oneida disappeared and was gone long enough to requisition a quarter of fresh beef and a kettle. He had found the kettle in a deserted house and had butchered a steer close to the road. We camped long enough to boil some of the beef, which was tough and unsavory for the lack of salt. Tree Breaker did not care for salt and ate heartily. While we were eating there was a rushing of feet through the bushes, and the two horses which I had hobbled, made much noise. We ran to investigate and found three militiamen striving to remove the hobbles.

I covered them with my Deckhard and ordered them to leave the animals alone. The Oneida poised his ax.

"They belong to us. We ride north to join the army," I said.

"Army? ——! There ain't no army," bawled the leader of the trio. "Guess we'll have to take these critters in the name of the republic."

The Oneida brandished his ax and sounded his war-cry, as one the three turned and dived into the bushes. In their flight south they had even thrown away their fire-locks.

"No —— good!" spat out the Tree

Breaker, speaking in English, it is needless to say.

When we resumed our journey we glimpsed small bodies of men skulking through the bush and fields on either side of the road. These were more of the militia in a panic. And it was a curious fact that whenever we succeeded in questioning any of these fugitives we were none the better off as for news. They were filled with frenzied words, and drew the most absurd pictures of the calamity. We were so impressed with the utter uselessness of seeking the truth before reaching Fort Edward that we desisted from further efforts.

Late that evening we came to Saratoga. General Schuyler's country house on the right where the road crosses Fishkill creek, was dark. But a light burned in a church on the left. I left the Oneida with the horses before this building while I advanced to investigate. Although the night was warm the door of the church was closed. I threw it open and beheld a dozen men and women. An elderly man was addressing them. He ceased speaking when the door opened. I was amazed at the expression of horror on each face as there was nothing alarming in my appearance.

"The Indians are here!" shrieked a woman. In the shaft of light shot through the open door they had seen the Oneida, an equestrian figure in bronze.

"We are messengers from General Washington," I loudly proclaimed. "We seek General Schuyler. Can you give us any information as to where we might find him?"

"God be with him! But we fear he has been killed with all the others," said the elderly man. "He was to march with reinforcements to Ticonderoga. That's the last word we received. Please take your Indian away. He frightens the women folks." And, in all truth, he might have added, "the men folks."

We crossed the Fishkill and forced our tired mounts for another two miles, or until we came to the ford of the Hudson, and went into camp for the night on the Fort Edward road. The Tree Breaker had fetched the kettle and meat along and we made a meal after a fashion.

We finished the fifty-mile ride by noon the next day and found General Schuyler just returned from a futile attempt to lead a slender force to aid St. Clair hold the Northern Gate. But an army of five thousand could not have held the place once the enemy had hauled their guns up the steep slopes of Sugar Loaf Hill. Learning from his aide that I was from General Washington's headquarters General Schuyler had me before him, and immediately I experienced the charm of his most gracious personality.

He was strong without being autocratic. America always came first with him, and position and power could pass him by without lessening by a tittle his zeal for the republic. I explained my errand was to observe conditions and remit reports to Washington. He sorrowfully said:

"It will be sad news for General Washington. I did what I could to put the fort and works in condition and General St. Clair did all he could to strengthen the place. But we lacked supplies and we needed twice as many men as we had. I am starting a messenger south at once, giving the facts of the affair. Ticonderoga was shelled from an unoccupied height. The army retreated across a floating bridge at midnight. The women, the sick and the wounded were taken to Skenesborough on two hundred bateaux, escorted by six hundred men in five galleys, commanded by Colonel Long. We lost our heavy artillery and supplies.

"Once the garrison troops crossed the lake they were joined by the troops from Fort Independence. General Fraser pursued these on the sixth, followed by Riedesel and his German grenadiers. Burgoyne and Phillips followed Colonel Long and his flotilla, overtaking them on the seventh at the wharves of Skenesborough. Two galleys surrendered.

"The crews destroyed the others as well as burning the mills, the stockade and the bateaux. Colonel Long then fell back to Fort Anne, eleven miles below. Yesterday morning he would have whipped Colonel Hill, the foremost of his pursuers, if not for the Indians under St. Luc de La Corne, sent forward by Burgoyne from Skenesborough. Burning Fort Anne Colonel Long fell back to this fort, arriving this morning."

"Where is General St. Clair, General?"

"God knows. He retreated into the New Hampshire Grants. If you wish to do a service, sergeant, scout to the east and find him and urge him to bring his force here at once. I thank God that Burgoyne is marching his army from Skenesborough! He will find much trouble in getting through. Had he gone back to Ticonderoga and come down Lake George he would have had an open road to Albany. He could have been here to reduce this fort by the thirteenth. At least we have that to be thankful for."

"General, I shall be pleased to make the scout now there is no need for me to duplicate your message to General Washington. I will take with me an Oneida, the Tree Breaker, an old friend. It will save me some explanations later if you will add to your report that you are using me for special work and that I have nothing to add to what you have so kindly told me."

"I'll fix that, Sergeant Morgan. How Congress will howl and want to dance my scalp! Well, well, they've danced better ones."

"I deny that, general," I warmly declared.

He smiled benevolently and patted my shoulder and walked to the door with me.

"Beware of the savages after you have met and passed through my line of axmen," he cautioned. "They swarm the woods, scalping the dead and dying. And as the rum is in and the ax is out they're scalping the British and Hessian wounded and dead, too. The Tories of Argyle are frantically flocking to Burgoyne and begging him to protect them from his red pets. Burgoyne will have his unquiet moments in doing that very thing. Ottawa help is a blade that cuts with two edges. Good luck, lad."

The marvel of the man to me was his capacity for being gracious, even solicitous for my welfare, when he knew the storm was rolling up which would sweep him from his command and deliver the department to the less worthy Gates.

REJOINING the Oneida I found him surrounded by a circle of soldiers who were inclined to resent his presence, being suspicious of his Americanism. He did not seem to know they were there, and his haughtiness held them back from any demonstration beyond muttered threats and epithets. He was relieved by my appearance, however, and was eager to be off. We struck into the old military road used by Abercrombie and Amherst in the French war, and followed it for a few miles.

This was the road open to Burgoyne had he had the wit to use it instead of attempting to bring his army through a virgin wilderness, where nature's obstacles were augmented by the American backwoodsmen. He was to use up twenty-four precious days in covering twenty-six miles, and each day of grace was worth a regiment to Schuyler and his weakened army.

We met several scores of soldiers straggling into the road from the bush. These, although having been in contact with the enemy, were not suffering from panic. They did seem to be disprited. Possibly a majority of them should have been in the hospital. Three wagon drivers were emptying the brine from their casks of pork to lessen the load, thus spoiling the pork. This was due to ignorance rather than fear, for otherwise they would have cut loose the horses and fled.

Two men—nay, mere boys—attracted my attention by their extreme youth and their emaciation. They barely managed to walk and clung to each other for mutual support. Horses were useless where I proposed going, and I signaled the Oneida to dismount. The two invalids halted in alarm and one of them drew a knife, the only weapon they seemed to possess. They imagined the Indian and I intended to take their scalps.

"Get up on the horses. Tell them at Fort Edward that Sergeant Morgan and the Tree Breaker will call for them later," I said, leading the animals forward.

Even then they feared some trickery. I motioned the Oneida to retire a few rods and I laid my Deckhard on the ground to aid them in mounting. They did not attempt to thank me with words, but their lips trembled and big tears rolled down their poor cheeks. They rode away to safety. I briefly explained to my companion the things told me by General Schuyler, and his eyes flamed as he heard the name of St. Luc.

"His warriors will be very thick in the woods," he hissed. "It is good. The western Indians shall show the Elder Brothers how to fight. It is said the Oneidas are quick to learn."

We had covered about three out of the sixteen miles between Fort Edward and Fort Anne, and now it was time to leave the road and strike through the timber due east so as to pass some ten miles below Fort Anne. This course I hoped would bring me in contact with General St. Clair's army. For the first few miles we took advantage of the game trails and covered the ground quickly. Until night came we made no efforts to conceal our advance. The Oneida bagged several grouse and as I had procured a small supply of salt while at Edward I fared well. Before sunrise we were racing toward the east. After two hours of fast work the Oneida in the lead threw out his hand as a signal for me to halt. I heard it, a heavy, crashing sound far ahead.

"The axmen," I murmured.

We soon came up to them; sullen, determined fellows, who knew they risked their lives each moment they paused to impede the advance of Burgoyne's army. For every two choppers there was a man on guard with a flintlock. First would come the cloud of Indians, and last the veteran of Portugal and his regulars. Could I have known that those continental honors were to receive no luster from our northern woods I would not have felt so downhearted as I watched the backwoodsmen bring down tree after tree. The men scowled fiercely at the Oneida, who stared straight ahead, leaving it for me to obtain free passage for him. And I doubt if he could have traversed the barricaded area alive if my explanation had not served as road-belt.

The axmen gave back doggedly and only when they had left a *chevaux-de-frise* behind them. Now began our difficulties. Huge trees had carried down those of lesser growth, and the long winrows presented a rare jumble of splintered branches and upright boughs. So thorough was the work in spots that it did not seem as if a weasel could get through. But the Tree Breaker, with the cunning of his clan tutelary, the Bear, glided around and climbed over and dived under, our route often being circuitous yet always swinging back to the east. The Indian always kept ahead, his painted head and oiled body shining like a snake. Here in the woods his facial decorations were most ghastly.

He dropped on his knees and wriggled under a huge bole. I followed at his heels, but instead of rising he remained flat on his stomach. I drew myself beside him, and he whispered:

"An Ottawa. A very big man. He should be very brave. Wait for me." Before I could remonstrate, or ask a question, he glided like a snake into the débris and was gone. Some ants from a rotten log began to explore me, much to my inconvenience. In the north I heard the howling of wolves, the dead in the forest tempting them to the hunting before it was dark. Then came a subdued scuffling sound, nearby but cut off from my line of vision by the thick growth. I located it as being just beyond a prostrate pine, the branches of which formed a green wall.

As I stared at this two brown hands appeared, clutching the boughs, and a moccasined foot was thrust through and rested on the trunk. I raised my rifle, then lowered it, as through the screen stepped the Tree Breaker. He held something above his head and howled his scalp-cry. Then with grotesque steps, striking his feet smartly into the forest mold, he danced to my hiding place. While he was thus indulging his vanity, another hand appeared through the green tangle, and another Indian stood on the tree trunk and fitted an arrow to his bow. I knocked him backward, killing him instantly, his bare legs remaining in sight.

The Oneida wheeled and leaped to my victim and was soon repeating his scalp-cry, and was dancing back with two, instead of one, gory trophies. From the song he improvised I learned that both Indians were Ottawas, "big as forest trees, but quickly broken down by the mighty Tree Breaker of the Bear Clan of the Oneida people." Not a word as to my part in the tragedy. I finally managed to secure his attention and upbraided him for risking our lives by calling the dead warriors' companions down upon us.

"Ho, White One who shoots before a tree-cat can snarl, there were but two. I found their trail before I killed one. My white brother did well, but to seize a man with the bare hands, to bend him and break him as a bear pulls down and breaks a young tree to get at the ripe fruit, is the coup the Oneidas make into songs."

"There will be others following these two."

"The Tree Breaker has a long voice. He will make new medicine if his scalp-cry does not bring more game to his trap."

"I am scouting for General Schuyler, not to kill Indians. If you wish to stay here and kill mangy Ottawas I will go on alone. But until I find St. Clair there must be no killing for the killing's sake. I have spoken."

"There is a cloud over the sun," he said after a brief silence. "Its shade is over the White One's heart. Or it may be wild pigeons passing, or thick tree tops shutting out the light. If the cloud goes away the Tree Breaker will follow his white brother and let his hands and knife sleep."

This was handsomely said, especially for an Indian. I replied:

"The sun drinks up the cloud. It burns the tree tops away and lets in the light. The pigeons have passed over to the Hatirontaks. The White One sees the path clearly. Come!"

This time I took the lead as he had suggested.

It was very warm and the black flies tormented us, but of savage life there was no evidence. Yet we knew the scalp-yells had been heard and that as we pressed east a horde of the enemy's red allies were hastening west to learn who had fallen and to avenge his death. It was impossible to read beneath the hideous mask of paint on Tree Breaker's face, but he could not suppress the excitement shining in his eyes. He was keyed up to great adventures and his hand was ever on the handle of his tomahawk, his quick gaze sweeping half circles as he sought enemies in ambush.

Our progress was interrupted by a call for help instead of by a war-cry. Expecting only the latter I was rendered stupid for a moment. The faint voice mouthing the one word "help" died down into a groan. The Oneida's nostrils pinched in and his savage little eyes became dancing dots as he sought to locate the sufferer.

"Water! water! For the love of God—water!"

"A wounded man," I whispered.

"Let the Tree Breaker go and bring him here," he said. But this I feared to do, for if the sufferer should be an English soldier the Oneida would quickly spoil his throat. I shook off Tree Breaker's hand and crawled forward. Now the voice was faintly moaning. I parted some dead branches and beheld a man with both arms over his head. He had heard me, or sensed my presence, for he began gasping—

"Water—water—water."

"I am a friend," I said bending over him.

Instantly two sinewy arms were around my neck and his long legs were twisted about mine, holding me helpless, and his voice in my ear, as he shouted in an Indian dialect I did not understand, deafened me. I struck blindly but could do him no mischief. Guns began to bang and the shrieking cry of defiance of the Oneida came from a distance. Then strong hands were seizing me and trussing me up with lengths of rawhide. I was stood on my feet and the make-believe sick man also stood up and brushed the twigs and dirt from his forest clothes and bowed prettily, sweeping his hat to the ground.

"AH, *M'SIEU*, of the Soft Heart, I salute you. You are most polite," he mocked, and he made another elaborate bow. There was no guessing his age as his long beard was coppery brown and his hair showed no gray. Completely surrounding us was a circle of savages, naked except for loin cloths, or a shirt. These were tall, brawny fellows, fantastically painted.

From their stature I took them to be Ottawas. They eyed me hungrily. The Frenchman, for he was that although he spoke English without any accent that I could catch, continued:

"*M'sieu* is like an angel from heaven. He hears the voice of suffering. His heart melts. What does *m'sieu* think should be his reward for such gentle kindness?"

He was playing with me and vastly amusing his red followers. I said nothing and turned my back. He whirled me about and struck me in the face, and with a voice of velvet begged:

"Please, please, *m'sieu*, give me your attention for a little. What shall *m'sieu* have for pitying the voice of the distressed?"

This time I was careful not to take my eyes from his gaze. With more mincing steps, which seemed to amuse his red friends much, he answered his own query by saying—

"*M'sieu* shall have the honor of being the next to fit into an Ottawa kettle."

He waited to see how this announcement affected me. I was too benumbed by the shock of my capture to display any emotion. With a shrill screech he grabbed my hair with both hands and shook my head violently, and yelled:

"Into the pot with you this night. You shot the Turtle. Your red companion killed my best trailer. You shall die two deaths in one."

I gathered my wits and asked—

"Who are you that have to play such sorry tricks to get your man?"

He struck his chest lightly and threw back his head, and in a shrill voice proclaimed:

"I am St. Luc de La Corne, veteran of Pontiac's war, the French war, and of this little war. You have killed two of my best warriors. It will be hard to cover their bones with one body, but we will do the best we can."

Far off rose the triumphant cry of the Oneida. St. Luc glared wolfishly at me and demanded—

"That means what?"

"The Oneida has made another kill. He'll get all your trailers if you do not call them back."

His rage seemed to have left him. With no show of resentment he gave an order and two of his Ottawas took hold of my elbows and helped me over the encumbered ground, making toward the north. Once when I pitched forward and the savages were roughly dragging me to my feet the strange creature spoke harshly to them, whereat they handled me more gently. Near sundown we halted outside of the felled timber, and from the appearance of the camp I estimated that fully two hundred warriors were accommodated there. Shortly after I had been tied to a tree two Indians arrived with the body of a dead Indian on a litter. The man had been scalped.

His head rolled grotesquely as though his neck had been broken, but I could discover no wounds upon him. The Tree Breaker had counted another extraordinary coup by remembering he was of the Bear clan. St. Luc stared at the dead man thoughtfully, then gave an order. The litter was placed at my feet. This was the Ottawa the Oneida had killed after I was captured.

By depositing the corpse at my feet I was given to understand that I would be held responsible, that I must pay for three deaths instead of two.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ONEIDA BRINGS A TRADE-BELT

ST. LUC kept away from me until he had eaten; nor did any of his evil brood annoy me. When he approached he came alone, his warriors keeping well back. He said:

"I am filled with pain, *m'sieu*, to announce my braves are very angry over the death of their friends. I fear it will go hard with you. Of course you must die, but I had hoped it would be something easy and simple."

The black-hearted scoundrel! This speech was skilfully calculated to be the beginning of my torture.

"We Morgans are very brave men. We do not seem to notice physical pain as do most men," I told him.

"Morgan?" he exclaimed. "Not related to General Daniel Morgan?"

"His brother," I lied, seized by the inspiration to trade on one of the most famous names of the republic.

He lost something of his aplomb and twisted the ends of his beard and gnawed them reflectively. It was all very well to cook an ordinary soldier in an Ottawa kettle, but to use General Morgan's brother thus might stir up a very far reaching retribution.

"What rank?" he snapped.

There was nothing in my rifle dress to designate my rank, and I replied:

"A captain in Morgan's riflemen, now detailed for special service at the request of General Schuyler."

He continued chewing his beard and entirely lost his air of mocking politeness. Were I Daniel Morgan's brother there would be much pother made from Burgoyne down to guarantee me decent treatment. Burgoyne was unable to save all the Indians' prisoners from torture, but he did what he could. After a few moments of moody thought St. Luc said:

"No one knows who you are. No one knows Morgan's brother has been captured. You've told me nothing. I'm afraid that Captain Morgan will be marked 'missing' on the rolls with no one ever the wiser as to just how he ended his career."

"You forget the Oneida. He will report back to General Schuyler about my capture. A flag will be sent and information requested from Burgoyne. The Oneida is as wise as he is brave."

"May a thousand devils skin your Oneida! I'll give a barrel of rum to the Indians who bring in his hair."

"America is not wide enough, nor long enough, for you to hide if General Morgan knows you killed me by torture."

He simulated amusement and with a laugh replied:

"Your General Morgan will be running to Florida to hide himself when he hears of General Burgoyne's great victory."

"You've spoken a lie and you know it is a lie, and you've also made a foolish misstatement," I told him. He fumed and indulged in a violent pantomime and whetted the fears of the Indians, who thought he was about to kill me off-hand. When he had subsided I went on:

"General Morgan never hides. You know that, so you lied when you spoke of Florida. Burgoyne's 'great victory' is a flash in the priming pan. If he advances he will be whipped."

In rich disgust St. Luc exclaimed:

"Zut! Either you are a fool, or think I am one. Whipped! *Mon Dieu!* Who is there to do the whipping?"

"Disease and hunger will begin it. The American army will finish it," I boldly answered.

"Name of an ass! We'll cut your comb slowly, my young cock, for that talk. Whip General Burgoyne when already your rabble of boys and sick men are caught between him and General Howe, with Colonel St. Leger soon nipping in from the west? Faugh! We'll cook the silliness out of your young bones."

"Howe's troops have sailed for the Chesapeake to try for Philadelphia. We do not worry about St. Leger."

He stared at me thoughtfully, trying to decide how much of my talk he should believe. Speaking slowly and with jeering disdain he said—

"You say Howe has sailed south, when we all know he is ordered to meet General Burgoyne at Albany?"

He could not disguise his uneasiness, for he was ever one to fight with the winner. We had captured ten men within thirty days who had tried to pass through our lines to Howe in New York. St. Luc's bearing proved to my satisfaction that the northern army had no suspicions as to Howe's real plans. I said:

"I am fresh from New York. Howe's troops embarked several days ago. He has received no orders to cooperate with Burgoyne."

He stripped a withe from a bush and cleared it of leaves and then quietly said—

"You puppy, to talk such foolishness to St. Luc de La Corne."

He struck me several vicious blows across the face, each leaving a burning welt. The Indians rushed forward to enjoy this assault, expecting it would lead to a richer sport. One man, a brawny Caughnawaga Mohawk, carried a big kettle, and called out:

"The children are hungry, Big Brother. See! they have a fire lighted." He pointed to the flames in the middle of the camp.

"Tell them they must first catch my Oneida," I cried. "For if he escapes to tell of my capture General Burgoyne will be angry that I was not brought to headquarters."

St. Luc motioned for the savages to halt and puckered his brows in cogitation. Around him stood his expectant followers, their eyes glistening. But I had put two obstacles in the way of an immediate killing. St. Luc might pretend to hold our army in contempt, but General Morgan was not a man to be disregarded. The other deterrent was my statement concerning Howe's movements. If I spoke the truth it was of prime importance that Burgoyne should be told. If Sir William had sailed for the Chesapeake instead of up the Hudson then there was a chance of the invading army accomplishing but little.

St. Luc's knowledge of our north country, of the scattered settlements and scarcity of food, of the difficulty of maintaining a line of supplies against the bushfighting of our woodsmen, easily permitted him to picture a less rosy future for British arms. I believed he would have willingly postponed my fate had it not been for the furious demands of his Indians.

A tall Menominee pointed dramatically at the dead savage at my feet, and made an impassioned plea. A Sioux chief, who wore a head-dress of feathers unlike any worn by our eastern Indians, spoke next. I could not understand what he said, but his mental attitude toward me was shown when he stuck his ax into the tree within an inch of my head.

As if this were a signal the tree was now surrounded by whooping, yelling savages, their knives slicing the air close to my face, their axes thudding into the tree until my body was fenced in with iron tomahawks. St. Luc shrugged his shoulders and stepped back as though the situation had passed beyond his control.

After all, his only claim to power was his leadership of the wild horde. When they could not be stopped from butchering British wounded and scalping the most ardent of the Argyle Tories why should I expect him to fend them off from an American prisoner?

The dancing ceased and the Sioux chief made a speech which had to do with his war record, for as he talked he touched the feathers on his long head-dress, each feather standing for some notable coup. A Sac began pounding the bottom of the kettle as if it were a war-drum.

"*M'sieu* can see I am helpless. What will you have when my children are so incorrigible?" called out St. Luc.

In gazing toward him my eyes discovered a splotch of scarlet at the edge of the woods. A British soldier had wandered into the scene, and even as I saw him he threw up his hands in disgust and turned to leave me to my fate. But I would not have it so, and scored on his conscience by yelling:

"Englishman! Wait and see a Welshman die!"

AT FIRST I thought he would not heed my cry, but after some hesitation he wheeled and strode into the camp. The savages became silent and eyed him sullenly. St. Luc was ill at ease, for his face twitched perceptibly beneath his beard.

"I am Captain Morgan, brother of General Morgan," I loudly announced. "Your red allies are about to boil me."

He was not more than twenty-two or four and looked very brave in his gay uniform.

"Curse the luck, captain! What can I do? I am Lieutenant Levering of the Advance Corps. General Burgoyne himself can only go about so far with these red devils."

"Ah! *M'sieu* says the true word," sighed St. Luc. "I reason, I beg, I plead, but they will not be denied. A regiment of bayonets can stop them, yes. But what about scouts after they turn back to Michilimackinac?"

"I'll give them four oxen and a hogshead of rum for this man," said the lieutenant. "Tell them that. I have twenty guineas in my chest for you, sir."

"A million devils take your guineas!" snarled St. Luc. "How long since a boy lieutenant can make gifts to St. Luc de La Corne? As for your rum and oxen my children will laugh at you. They take all drink and meat they want."

The lieutenant colored and his blue eyes grew ominous; yet he held himself well in hand.

"*Monsieur*, there are other prisoners for your Indians if they will but take to the woods and find them. This man is a brother of General Morgan. He is an officer."

"And he was captured while trying to assist what he supposed to be a wounded man, possibly an Englishman," I broke in, and added how St. Luc had fooled me. St. Luc grinned evilly. The lieutenant grimaced. The Frenchman pointed to the dead Indian and said:

"The prisoner's friend, a bloody Oneida, killed three of my Ottawas, Lieutenant Levering. My red children have their code even as you have yours. They must cover their dead. My Ottawas firmly believe they must do this, or Michibou, the Great Hare, or Namepich, the Carp, or their third god, the Bear, will be displeased with them. They are droll in their notions, but white men have been much the same and fought wars over their religions. The other tribes represented here feel the same."

"Yet, *monsieur*, you and I ought to be able to circumvent them. Make them liberal promises. God knows we do not feel any affection for Morgan's riflemen, who make a practice of shooting officers, but this man can not go to the kettle. It would be a stain on your honor, *monsieur*. General Morgan would make a rare reprisal, looking for you first, *monsieur*."

"Bah! That for Morgan, the Welshman!" jeered St. Luc, snapping his fingers; but he did not mean it. "Only St. Luc de La Corne and Charles de Langlade can manage these wild men. And we can go only so far. It is the fortune of war. I advise *m'sieu* to retire at once."

The young lieutenant was torn between his great desire to aid me and his horror of being a witness to what would appall the stoutest heart. His manhood would compel him to remain with me until the last moment, even though he be unable to help me. I said to him:

"Howe will not join Burgoyne at Albany. Get these —— to wait until you can take that word to headquarters. Then you've done all you can for me. The rest will be General Burgoyne's responsibility. He will be keen to question me about my knowledge of Howe's plans. I have been in New York and I know the truth."

Thus I baited my words with what all New York knew by this time, but which Burgoyne did not know. My request afforded the lieutenant an honorable chance to avoid witnessing my death and at the same time suggested the only rational course for saving my life.

"By heavens, Captain Morgan, you shall not die if these beggars will wait until I can reach our general. If the Advance Corps were within hail we'd have you out of this fix and let the explanations come afterwards."

"*M'sieu* forgets it's bad business to interfere with my control of the Indians," ominously spoke up St. Luc. "They do not love the English so much that they will suffer very much. Beware, *m'sieu*, and be thankful they do not understand your words. Go to your commander. I will try to keep them quiet for twenty-four hours, but if you meet your corps do not bring it here, for I will not be responsible for the bloody heads they will wear."

"Bloody heads!" angrily cried the lieutenant. "There are not enough of these red scum in America to give the Advance Corps any concern. But remember the twenty-four hours, and longer if no word comes from Burgoyne by then."

Turning to me Levering patted my shoulder and tried to smile encouragement. I felt most grateful to him and would have liked to take his hand. He was English and I was Welsh, and an accident of geography had set us against each other, eager to whip and kill before we had seen each other. Now that I was in the toils he felt nothing but friendship and sympathy for me and would, I knew, do his utmost to succor me. What grim irony that such warm fellowship could not have been experienced before the quarrel began!

He hurried from the camp to find some one with authority and the power to enforce it. He left St. Luc in a villainous humor. The Englishman's manner sat heavy on the Frenchman. The assurance, the unconscious air of superiority, and the racial difference between them, worked my captor up to a white heat of venom. And I was the only object he could vent his rage upon. The Indians had remained silent, staring at their white leader. St. Luc, appreciating the red man's grasp of dramatic values, struck a haughty pose. At last he addressed me, saying—

"General Burgoyne can not afford to lose his red allies for the sake of saving one white enemy."

"General Morgan's brother can not be tortured without every one of his riflemen taking an oath to run down St. Luc de La Corne."

"I have been thinking of that, *m'sieu*," he frankly confessed. "I do not believe any one would care to follow me beyond Michilimackinac, however. Then again there is no certainty the Oneida knows that I had a hand in your capture. And if he does there is no certainty he will live to take the news to Schuyler. What is told to Burgoyne amounts to nothing. When it is too late he will keep very quiet. I have a hundred warriors out under Charles de Langlade hunting for your red brother. If he can escape from de Langlade he is a master at woodcraft. He has no gun, only a knife and an ax."

"And his hands and arms," I added. "The first Indian he killed was with his hands and arms. He is not called the Tree Breaker for nothing. He kills like a bear. Your vermin will never dance his scalp."

"Perhaps not if they hunted him without Langlade. But the man who was cunning enough to destroy Braddock, *m'sieu*, will find the task of running down one Indian to be very simple. Yet I am a cautious man, *m'sieu*. I will have my children wait a bit."

Facing his warriors he spoke to them at some length. Their impassive faces betrayed no emotion, but after he had finished and had listened to a few short responses he told me:

"It was very close to failure, *M'sieu* Morgan. You have been shaking hands with death while I talked. It is only because I made them believe Langlade would wish to be present when you burn that they consented to wait until morning. By then I shall know about the Oneida. If he is hit in the head they can take you and welcome. I care nothing for Burgoyne's feelings."

"But if the Oneida is not captured or killed by morning?"

He pursed his lips for a moment's deliberation, then decided:

"Then they'll have you just the same, only I will leave the camp and say it all happened against my orders and in my absence. In that way every one will save his face and the blame put upon my irresponsible red children."

"Leaving only General Morgan to be dealt with."

"I'm not afraid of Morgan. He will blame Burgoyne."

He lied. He was afraid of Daniel Morgan. But he believed Morgan could never reach him in the Michilimackinac country. In postponing my death until the morrow he granted me no favor beyond a few more hours of painful anticipation. It would be impossible for Lieutenant Levering to reach Burgoyne and set about my rescue before sunrise. Burgoyne would be at Skenesborough, or close to it. Woods travel would be slow, and the lieutenant was no woodsman.

"At least have this dead Indian removed and allow me to sit down," I asked.

WITH much politeness St. Luc himself unfastened the thongs which held me to the tree. After I had slumped into a sitting posture he had the Indians take the dead warrior to one side, had others bring me water and a wooden platter of fair beef. Nor did he forget a pinch of salt. That night they extended my arms and feet and tied them to four saplings.

They placed a small sapling across my body and a warrior slept on each end of it. My slightest movement brought my guards to a sitting posture, their war-axes raised. I slept none, for my dread of the morning was terrible. I hope I am not more of a physical coward than the average man, but to lie there, helpless, to know I was surrounded by ferocious foes, to realize there was an ordeal which I must endure before receiving the mercy of death, nagged my mind to the verge of insanity.

The camp was astir at an early hour and St. Luc came and stood to look down on me. My manhood returned as pride urged me to remember the brave fellows who called me friend. I kept telling myself that there was a maximum of physical pain, and that once I endured it the savages could torment me no further. St. Luc's greeting was malicious. He said—

"I fear *m'sieu* did not rest well last night."

"The sapling bore heavily on my chest. It annoyed me."

He bowed and gave an order to my guards. They released my aching limbs and allowed me to sit with my back against the tree.

"How much grace do I have?" I asked, striving to speak with unconcern.

"I fear only an hour." From his deep sigh one might have imagined he was extremely sorry. "Langlade has not come in. I go to look for him. I shall command my children not to distrub *m'sieu* while I am away, but *m'sieu* knows how playful and unreliable Indians are. Still we will hope for the best."

"I only hope that General Morgan catches you before Burgoyne's army is turned back."

"*M'sieu* has the rich fancy in wishing," he said with a smirk. "But I forget I am the host."

He went to the nearest fire and soon the Sioux with the long head-dress came and placed beef and a tin dipper of water beside me. He must have been a big war-chief in his nation and his personal attendance on my wants evidenced the certainty of my fate. He stood and watched me eat and said something I could not understand. The guard who had released one of my hands and who remained squatting on his haunches close by me interpreted:

"Black Cloud says you will die like a brave man. That your scalp will be dried on a black hoop because you are a soldier. He says that the inside will be painted green with red on it to show you died by fire."

I do not believe that any normal man has an appetite for food when facing a violent death. It did not need the Sioux warrior's words to plunge me in mental misery. I had suffered that all night. The sight of the food nauseated me, yet I was being sharply watched for some sign of weakness. I have ever held the white race is superior to all other races only so long as it maintains a superiority of deportment.

If our religion and upbringing can not afford us the boon of dying like men, if our mental supremacy can not more than make up for the savage's insensibility to physical pain, then our civilization is inferior to that of the Iroquois, who knew not that David said, "I will fear no evil."

Because of what I owed to my blood and the teachings of the Psalmist I did endeavor to bear myself bravely, and did force myself to eat the beef and ask for more. Of the water I could not get enough. On returning with my second helping the Sioux chief declared:

"This is a brave man. His people will never hang their heads. His women will tell his children how he died." The Mohawk interpreted this.

I finished eating and the Indians about their fires bolted the last mouthfuls in their impatience to witness how an American could die. St. Luc had stood at one side while I ate and nodded in approval when I sent back my platter for more. Now he walked to the middle of the camp and briefly harangued the red men and then made a pretense of departing. But I could see the bushes move where he remained to watch secretly the torture. Left to the mercies of the warriors I was courteously addressed by a Caughnawaga, who requested me to stand up while they arranged the post. The post was the tree to which I had been tied. This was trimmed to a height of twelve feet. When they had finished I called the Caughnawaga's attention to the stump of a small branch and asked that it be smoothed off.

With a blow of his ax he did as I asked and then shouted to his own people:

"Ho! Ho! A brave man will die this morning. A very brave man will do us honor."

This was repeated in various tongues until all the savages understood; and their war axes were raised in salute to my sturdy bearing. But I took no glory in my rôle, for I was maintaining it only by will power. But will power is a fickle thing and may be routed at any moment; so I concentrated on the Twenty-third Psalm and held my mind to it.

When they had finished with the tree I stepped to it of my own accord, anxious to have it all finished before I should break down. That was the crevice in my armor; I had not practised faith, and I feared I was unmanly in waiting until in the last extremity before asking for help. I never had the respect for the eleventh hour worker in the vineyard that I had for him who came in the early morning. Yet the tardy worker was paid. But I humanized the Almighty.

I saw him from my own poor little plane. The Indians had me. There was not the slightest chance of escaping. Strange fatuity of the human mind! If I could discover an opportunity to escape I would give God the credit. With death inevitable I doubted His omnipotence. Yet I mouthed the psalm over and over and found it something to cling to if only to dull my mind. And I slipped the rope of rawhide around my wrists and told the Mohawk to tie it and throw the loose end over a branch fifteen feet above my head and make it fast.

Whereat the Caughnawaga struck the flat of his ax lightly against his lips as though amazed, and cried:

"This man is a chief. This man is a sachem with a very brave heart. The warrior who eats of his heart will be a very brave man. Ho! He is greater than a sachem. *Royana!*"

In pronouncing this, the highest term of respect an Iroquois can bestow, he held his ax above his head until every brown arm was similarly extended, holding either ax or knife.

They were sincere in this tribute; and through my intense concentration on David's song stretched the desire to maintain my show of hardihood to the end. I have always tried to believe that had the horrid affair proceeded I should have borne myself fittingly. No man can say how he will carry himself under similar circumstances. I have known rough, rude, ignorant borderers, who went through hell to their release with a smile and a taunt for their tormentors. I have been told of their stout hearts by their admiring executioners, who spoke of them with respect, aye, even with awe, and who saluted their memories with uplifted ax and "*Royana!*"

I try to believe that for the sake of my name and race I, too, would have endured the devilish torture so as to warrant a like remembrance of me on the part of the Iroquois. But I do not know. I do not know. One should not wait until the storm breaks before kindling the fires of faith. I do know that when the ——, slowly approaching the heaped up brushwood with lighted faggot, was halted by a loud cry from the edge of the forest there came a physical reaction that turned my legs to strings and would have revealed me in a sorry plight had not all heads been turned toward the newcomer.

It was the Tree Breaker, the Oneida. Ah, he was the man who should have been greeted as "*Royana!*" In honor of his brave heart should the hundred axes have been sent spinning to catch the first kiss of the sunbeams. For he came alone, unarmed, his extended hands holding wampum.

He ignored me and my circle of unlighted brush. He walked toward the savages with head held high, his carriage as haughty as that of a Mohawk wandering alone into an Abnaki village on the Penobscot to dictate to hundreds of warriors what tribute they must pay to the Long House. I had my blood and he had his, and he measured up to the situation with a calm, yet audacious courage I could never hope to possess. Not a savage of the various tribes sought to lay a hand on him, or hurl a weapon.

Their eyes burned as they stared at his hideously painted face. In the countenances of the Caughnawagas, once of the New York Mohawks, there flickered admiration for the man. He came to a halt and the Indians quietly arranged themselves in several lines before him. St. Luc ran from cover, panting with excitement and swinging a French ax. He did not stop until before the Oneida. He read the man's clan from the symbolic painting on the chest and from the imitation of claw scratches on the face. With a howl of exultation he raised his ax.

The Oneida did not move a muscle that I could see, except that his eyes darted a question at the Canadian Mohawks; and one of them caught the uplifted ax and held it. Another explained to the infuriated Frenchman:

"He is a bearer of belts. We will hear him."

ST. LUC puffed and panted, but reason at last returned, and relinquishing his ax he pretended to discover for the first time the nature of the Oneida's business.

"Let the Oneida speak," he grunted.

The Tree Breaker apparently did not hear him. A Mohawk said:

"Let the man of the Bear Clan speak. He brings a talk. He has belts. We will hear him."

The lines of warriors sank to a sitting posture. A Mohawk brought forward a robe and spread it before the Oneida. The Tree Breaker folded his arms and stared at the sky for five minutes; and no man moved or spoke. Then his powerful voice began:

"Sachems and warriors. Let this wampum open your ears to hear the truth so you may grow very wise."

He placed on the robe three strings, or a small belt. He continued:

"Sachems and warriors. Some of you come from the setting sun to kill the women and children of the Americans. Some of you were brothers of the keepers of the Eastern Door of the Long House before they tore up by the roots the great tree at Albany, to which was fastened the chain of friendship offered by the Thirteen Fires, and long before that, when the great council fire burned at Onondaga. You French Mohawks, who came down from Canada with the English, have killed more women and children than you have killed soldiers.

"This trouble between the Great Father over the water and his children of the Thirteen Fires is a family trouble, and you should keep your axes in your belts even as the Oneidas did. But you stick your axes in the heads of women and children and some of the Oneidas find a red ax sticking out of the ground and pick it up. You would torture a brave man after a white man caught him."

He dropped a black belt on the robe.

This insolent accusation of cowardice caused the savage lips to tighten, but while the Oneida waited for his words to be interpreted to the western Indians there was not a visage that did not reflect profound admiration. Then he resumed:

"Sachems and warriors. I come here without a path-belt. I come bringing no white wampum. I come with no bag of peace talk. I bring this for the men of the Ottawa nation."

He placed on the robe three belts of wampum, the usual Algonquin price for a prisoner's life. No Ottawa offered to pick up the belts. The Oneida after a brief pause continued:

"I bring this for the Sioux and their neighbors." He pulled a cord encircling his neck until an Indian pipe that had hung down his back was resting on his deep chest. It was richly decorated with feathers, each feather being symbolic and only understood, perhaps, by the bearer and the western Indians, as the latter pass pipes instead of belts. Removing the cord the Oneida placed the pipe on the robe. A Sioux warrior seated near bent over it and examined it with grave attention, but did not touch it. When he gave place others of his nation studied it carefully. But none offered to touch it.

The belts he had displayed looked to me like Ottawa wampum. I always believed he procured them from some warrior or warriors he had slain. I also believed St. Luc's Indians knew this to be the fact and admired him the more for it. I never got the truth from the Tree Breaker, although I later questioned him about the belts. He could be amazingly deaf at times, and usually so when there seemed no reason for reticence.

As for the pipe I recognized it as his own. He had fitted a long reed stem to it to accommodate the decorations. Without glancing in my direction my friend said:

"They say you have a white man, a brave man, prisoner. They say you would torture him and put him in a kettle. The three belts for the Ottawa, the pipe for the Sioux I offer for his life."

He waited several minutes, then a Mohawk, also of the Bear clan, rose and with much dignity replied:

"Sachem, we saw a very brave man before you came. He will not make us feel ashamed when he dies. Now we see two very brave men."

"Ho! Ho! Two very brave men!" cried the Iroquois.

The Mohawk continued:

"Sachem, it is a brave man who comes to us when his business is not to make peace between himself and the warriors he visits. It is a brave man who, even when he seeks peace, comes without a path-belt. That man will look Death in the face and be not afraid. Sachem, we have looked at the wampum and the pipe. We have had prisoners we would sell. Now we have much wampum. The western Indians have many pipes. We do not want either wampum or pipes."

"Ho! Ho! Two brave men will die. Each man will try to be brave as the other. Honor is done the Long House and the western tribes."

This was translated for the benefit of the western Indians, and St. Luc in the background, too wise to interrupt the ceremony, softly beat his hands together in great glee. The Oneida had come without a safe-conduct. He came neither to seek peace for his people, nor to offer the savages any advantage in exchange for my life. There was nothing attending his coming which could protect him from the fury of his enemies. Yet he stood with arms folded, his lips slightly curled in contempt. After the shouting had ceased and the Indians were settled down to wait with breathless interest his next move, each step in the drama being most keenly enjoyed by all, the Tree Breaker spurned the pipe and the strings of wampum and drew from his girdle something which he held enclosed in his two muscular hands.

"Sachems and warriors," he said, "the Ottawas have refused the three belts, their price when they have a prisoner to sell. The Sioux and their friends refuse the pipe, with its feathers from the eagle, the owl, the woodpecker and duck, who are chiefs of the day, the night, the forests and the waters. The Oneida has no more wampum, nor pipes, for them. Now here is a trade-belt for the Frenchman, who, they say, caught a brave man by a trick."

With that he held up a belt of leather, of French make. It meant nothing to me, but the moment St. Luc beheld it he gave a little snarling cry and ran forward and in violation of all Indian etiquet snatched it from the Oneida's hand. Heads twisted, eyes rolled, but no Indian rose.

"Sachems and warriors. It is the belt of Charles Langlade. The Tree Breaker holds him prisoner. Now you know why the Oneida comes here without a path-belt. If I do not go away from here very soon Langlade will die. De La Corne has taken my trade-belt to look at it and see if it is a good trade-belt. Wolves are howling on the mountains and in the woods. They will not wait for night. They will come down very soon to eat the dead and helpless. Does de La Corne return the belt to the robe, or does he keep it and save his white brother's life? I have spoken."

There was a surging and heaving throughout the squatting semi-circle, and the red men came to their feet and howled like the wolves that Tree Breaker had represented as about to devour Langlade. The ends of the half circle came together and the Oneida was surrounded by the infuriated warriors. Axes were held over his head; knives were thrust within an inch of his eyes; arrows were drawn to the head. Impassive as the tree to which I was tied he stood and stared vacantly into the grimacing faces. When he spoke it was calmly to say:

"Strike me—and kill Langlade. I have

killed three of you between two sleeps. I shall not count your dead, for they were squaws. One I killed with my empty hands, just as the bear kills by crushing. I am unarmed. Strike! And feed Langlade to the wolves."

The howling ceased abruptly. The Indians gave ground until the Oneida stood in the center of a cleared circle. St. Luc stood just outside the circle, still staring blankly at the Langlade's leather belt. To him the Indians turned for council. A Mohawk cried:

"The Little Father must not die. He led the attack on Fort William Henry."

An Ottawa stood forth and shouted vehemently; and I caught it when the Mohawk translated it to the eastern Indians:

"Black Cloud says the Little Father must not die. He killed the big chief Braddock and stuck the ax into many heads."

St. Luc strode inside the ring and confronted the Oneida, saying:

"Warrior of the Bear Clan of the Oneida. You come here without a path-belt. You defy these chiefs and warriors. You are a very brave man. You say this belt is Langlade's. How do we know you speak with a straight tongue?"

If he thought to tempt the Oneida into any revelations which might suggest schemes for Langlade's immediate release he was disappointed. The Indian gave him no heed. The savages pressed about St. Luc and fingered the belt eagerly. Through a double thickness of the leather the riveting tacks formed a *Fleur-de-lis* and the letters, 'C. L.' There was no mistaking the belt. The Indians identified it with little grunts. I do not know what measure of friendship existed between St. Luc and de Langlade, but I do know that St. Luc would rather lose a nation of his red allies than to lose the man who helped to plot Braddock's destruction. St. Luc addressed the savages in their several dialects, asking—

"My children, what shall we do with this trade-belt? Shall we give the white prisoner in exchange for the Little Father?"

Their cruel eyes were focused on me longingly, then turned to glare at the Oneida. Still I was only a white man, and there would be many such to torture. The Oneida might lose his medicine next time and be captured. There was only one Little Father.

After a considerable silence a Menominee spoke up. His speech was repeated by the Sioux and Sacs. I could not understand what they said, no more than when the Ottawas registered their decision. But when the Canadian Mohawks spoke I drew my first free breath; for the spokesman said—

"We must have the Little Father with us."

To the Oneida St. Luc said:

"We pick up the trade-belt. We keep it. A life for a life. But how do we know Langlade is unharmed? Go and bring him. When he walks into this camp your white friend shall be set free."

The Oneida looked at him scornfully, but did not speak. St. Luc angrily demanded—

"You will not trust us to set the white man free?"

"No. The white man goes with me. Before night Langlade will walk into this place. I have said it."

"Why should we trust you if you will not trust us?" passionately cried St. Luc.

"There is but one road for you to travel. When there are two roads you can stop and say, 'I will follow this road. It is smooth. The other road is filled with briars and sharp stones.' Now there is but one road. Ask the Canadian Mohawks, who left their ancient homes many moons ago to live with the French, to fight against the English in the French war. Ask them if a chief of the Oneidas, a man of the Bear clan, is to be believed. If my white brother goes with me now Langlade will come to you before the sun goes to sleep. I have spoken."

St. Luc, much worried, walked to one side and conferred with the leading men of the various tribes. When he returned to the Oneida I knew my fate was settled, either for the stake or for freedom. The Frenchman harshly announced:

"The white man is yours. Take him and go. Some of my braves will go with you to help Langlade walk here."

"My white brother goes alone with me. Langlade can walk alone."

This refusal of an escort had been anticipated; for although he clawed at his beard St. Luc did not consult his followers before replying.

"Let it be so," he said. "But if Langlade does not come here unharmed there are not enough woods, nor deep places in the earth, to hide you from us."

"A foolish bird is talking," jeered the Oneida. "Or the wind is blowing. When did the Tree Breaker ever grow afraid at the empty whistling of the wind, or the howling of a mountain wolf? Bears do not turn aside for wolves."

He came to me, and with a small knife from his girdle he cut me loose. Instead of hurrying me away he faced the baffled pack and said:

"My white brother says he can not walk without his gun. We are waiting. The wolves are howling and creeping down the mountain. There is no bear to keep them from Langlade."

With a snort of rage St. Luc spoke the word which produced my rifle, the shot-pouch and powder-horn. Not until I received my property back did the Oneida turn and stalk slowly toward the forest. As we passed the Frenchman he glared murderously and hissed epithets at us. But when we walked by the massed savages their stern faces showed no resentment, and the gleam in their eyes was one of approval of the Oneida's proud mien and great courage. First one, then another, then all raised their axes in salute to him; and the Mohawk gave the signal for the hoarsely shouted—"*Royanal*"

The savor of their praise was sweeter than life in the nostrils of my friend.

WHILE hot to reach the woods and make good my escape, although I knew the Indians would not back out of their bargain, I was forced to accommodate my pace to the Tree Breaker's, and he loitered along most carelessly. But once we had passed inside the green wall he darted his glance to all points of the compass and surprized me by taking an old trail leading south, one that was well beaten and would leave no signs, and beginning to run rapidly.

I followed at his heels, glad to place much distance between us and the enemy, yet disturbed by the chief's great haste. Fully four miles did we cover at a sharp trot when my friend halted and, motioning me to be cautious, daintily picked his way to one side and crouched down in the undergrowth. Perhaps only a minute passed, but it seemed a dozen, when we heard the soft fall of moccasined feet and through the lace-work of the boughs I caught a glimpse of a white man running at a dog-trot.

He wore a Canadian hat of gay color and a red sash, and his hair was streaked with gray. Behind him filed fully four score Indians, the foot of each falling on the spot trod on by the man ahead. A jumble of wild questions rose to my tongue, but the Oneida kept his hand on my knee for silence. After the last warrior had passed we yet waited to make sure there were no laggards. Then we stole back to the trail and the Oneida whispered:

"If my white brother does not wish to eat fire let him keep close to me. We have until those men reach the camp."

"They are tired. They have run a long distance. They will not go very fast," I said. "Who is the white man?"

"Langlade."

His answer put springs into my heels and I urged him to quicken his pace. But he held to his steady, swinging stride."

"Langlade?" I softly cried after him. "Then he has escaped!"

"Not from the Tree Breaker. He was not my prisoner."

"But you said——"

"My *orenda* put strange words into my mouth, so I might save my white brother. I talked to the Sioux who are snakes, and I used a crooked tongue. I talked to the Ottawas, who are wild men and talk only with evil spirits. To speak with a crooked tongue to them is wise. An owl, in which was the spirit of my grandfather, told me to do it. The French Mohawks went to live with the priests and desert their brothers in New York. I owe them nothing. Langlade sent his Indians chasing me. I doubled back to surprize him in his camp. He was gone, but I found his belt. I scouted the camp where my brother was tied up to be roasted before going into the kettle. Langlade was out in the woods hunting for me. So I took my trade-belt to St. Luc. He is a very foolish man."

"You risked all that to save me! You came when you knew Langlade might come at any time!"

"They were like children. The White One is my brother."

"By heavens, Tree Breaker, they did well to call you *Royanal*"

My tribute pleased him. His shoulders braced back. His invasion of the camp would be talked about from the Mohawk to Michilimackinac. He slowed down and tilted his head. I did likewise, but could hear nothing.

"They are very angry," he quietly informed me. "The next man they catch must be very brave not to show he is afraid. Now they know Langlade was never taken by the Tree Breaker."

"But four miles! They never had time to make that distance!" I demurred.

"They sent men to scout after us. They met Langlade. Now they are howling to tell St. Luc. They will be after us very soon. But the Bear is cunning. He leaves his scratches on a tree, but when does the hunter see him? Men live and die old men without meeting a bear in the woods unless they catch him in a hole."

"I hear nothing," I protested.

He jerked his head and half closed his eyes. Once more I concentrated on listening. Then I caught it, a thin pulsating cry coming from no particular direction. The pack were seeking the scent and never again would it do for me to be taken alive. The Oneida resumed running and at the end of a mile stopped and began hunting at the foot of a spruce. He drew forth his ax and knife and paint bag. "Now we will run," he said.

He was off like the wind and I had all I could do to keep within a rod of him. Behind us a hundred warriors were speeding along the various trails, spreading through the woods to investigate snug hiding places. Behind them a hundred travel-weary braves were coming, waiting for their second wind. St. Luc would seek to cut me off from surrendering myself to the British at Skenesborough, from escaping west to Fort Edward. And he would send some of his swiftest runners south, for his scouts had dogged our steps long enough to know we started in that direction.

The hunt seemed all but over for us.

TO BE CONCLUDED

FATE—THE BUSTER

by Allen Lee Haase

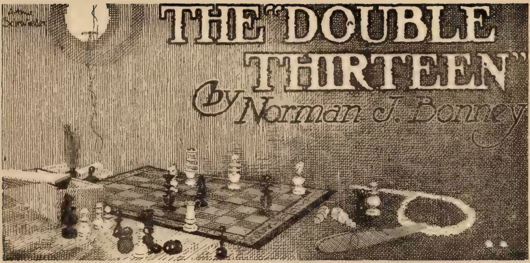
THEY'S a sign down at the Post offis where every one can see.
It says Come One, Come All, to a Publick Sale that's free
On May the first, nothin' reserved, land, tools and stock must go.
Th' highest bidder gets 'em, free Eats, free Sale, free Show.

They's sixty head o' horses, an' nine spry yearlin' mares
Jest broke t' take a saddle, er drive single er in pairs.
Twelve thousand head uh shorthorns, most 'bout two year old.
Eleven fine ranch buildin's an' ther contents must be sold.

Th' old man's be'n kinda moody-like, an' crosser than a bear;
He keeps a-walkin' 'cross the porch, then up an' down the stair.
He's made about three hundred trips tuh the cottons in th' draw
Where we laid his wife an' daughter, an' Jim, his son-in-law,

After Vasco made his killin' raid 'bout seven year ago
An' the Gov'ment said across the line they couldn't let us go.
You went Slim, an' so did Pete, when th' ol' man slipped across;
I notice yuh didn't say nothin', but yuh brung back Vasco's hoss.

An' now it's all for Sale. Oh, heck—a buyer's strike, they say,
Has run th' price uh yearlin' steers down to less than th' price uh hay,
An' the bank has called th' ol' man's loans; he's busted flat as ——;
So the're goin' tuh hold a auction uh the double Bar Dum-Bell.



THE "DOUBLE THIRTEEN"

by Norman J. Bonney

IT WAS the *Isota Maru's* maiden voyage. She was nine days out of Yokohama and fourteen hours out of Honolulu. Fair skies, a sea of glass and faultless turbines had conspired to make the voyage uneventful. From the first, Mrs. L. Apworth Meredith had suffered from the tedium of the long Pacific passage. Shuffle-board, deck quoits and all the other hundred and one inventions of travel-weary voyagers had from long association become classed as imbecilic in the mind of Mrs. Meredith. Ocean travel was to her a matter of pure business.

By other names and in different personalities Mrs. Meredith had sailed the Seven Seas. To Captain Juggins of the tramp *Ulysses*, who had brought her as passenger from Cape Town around the Horn to Rio, and from there to Boston, U. S. A., she was the daughter of a missionary whose life of privation and sacrifice had earned for him at last the full burial rites of a Zulu chieftain. Captain Svensen of the Swedish *Karl Gustav* would have remembered her as a Russian princess making a tour of the world without the formalities of a numerous attending suite. At present she posed as the widow of a gallant British officer some months deceased and in her presumably shallow memory almost forgotten. In cabin and saloon it was rumored that her period of mourning was over; that her widow's weeds, worn as a caterpillar wears its cocoon, would soon be cast aside, allowing her to burst forth, a butterfly of fashion. And Mrs. Meredith took pains to foster this impression by a number of mild flirtations with the most prepossessing among the male passengers.

In the shade of the promenade deck's wide canvas awning Mrs. Meredith half-sat, half-reclined in her steamer chair, her attention centered on two men, shipboard acquaintances, who were seated at opposite sides of a cloth-covered card-table playing chess. A steward had brought the table and chessmen from the smoking-room hours before, and the two men had been playing steadily since luncheon.

Mrs. Meredith had always thought of the ancient pastime as the slowest of all games, a sort of mental gymnastics requiring long study and more than ordinary intelligence before it could be mastered. But these two combatants of the checkered field played as if they were driven by a mad spirit of haste. Each player moved in turn, but move followed move with bewildering rapidity. Out of curiosity Mrs. Meredith had counted the number of times that the contestants had reset the pieces, and to her certain knowledge they had played more than thirty games since she had begun to keep tally.

From time to time during the afternoon promenaders had paused to watch the chess-play, and once she had heard a man say—

"Rapid-fire chess, interesting and sometimes brilliant."

He had spoken as one having authority on the subject of chess, and she had noted how the older of the two contestants watched the speaker out of the corner of one eye as he passed on along the deck.

Both chess-players were known by name

to Mrs. Meredith. The younger of the two, Barney Coburn, she had danced with on several occasions and knew him to be what he represented himself—a junior attaché of the American Legation in Peking. The other, an older man, had been pointed out to her as a Mr. Blodwen, a prosperous American with interests in the Chinese leather trade.

A shrewd judge of men, this characterization had not satisfied Mrs. Meredith as to the man's real business on board the *Isota*. Since leaving Honolulu, where certain information relative to Blodwen's affairs had reached her ears, she had persistently sought his acquaintance. She had secured an introduction, but Blodwen did not dance, preferring the company of the smoking-room to that of the ship's parlors. Mrs. Meredith knew nothing of the game of chess, but if knowledge of that particular pastime would promote relationship with Blodwen, that knowledge she resolved to acquire. Much could happen in the five days that would elapse before the *Isota* reached the Golden Gate.

The afternoon had sped more quickly than Mrs. Meredith had thought possible, and she was surprized when the declining sun began to peep beneath the edge of the deck awning. Its rays slanted into the eyes of Blodwen, who sat with his back against the white wall of the cabin facing the unruffled sea. He looked up in annoyance.

"Had enough, Frank?" asked his companion, noticing Blodwen's distracted attention.

"For this afternoon," answered the older man, glancing at his watch and rising suddenly from the table.

He lifted his gray tweed cap and bowed slightly to Mrs. Meredith, who had been sitting at his elbow all the afternoon and whom he now noticed for the first time.

"You haven't looked at me for hours, Mr. Blodwen," said the widow reproachfully.

"Astonishing that beauty should have been so near and I unaware of its presence," he replied with banal gallantry.

"That compliment, bald as it was, has earned your pardon," laughed Mrs. Meredith. "You were so absorbed in your chess that it took the sun himself to rouse you from it. I am almost tempted to ask you to teach me such a fascinating game."

Her tone was just serious enough to call for a serious reply, and Blodwen rose to the occasion as a trout in an untroubled pool rises to the carefully tossed fly of the angler.

"The game is fascinating," he said politely, "and if you really care to learn the moves I shall be glad to show you after dinner."

He was not averse to a prolonged *tête-à-tête* with the charming widow even though he had observed the carefully hidden wrinkles at the corners of her eyes that told him Mrs. Meredith was older than she wished to appear. As far as age was concerned he himself was no longer young. Despite his upright carriage, his black hair and keen eyes, there was an air of sophistication, of self-assuredness about the man, that made Mrs. Meredith estimate his age at somewhere in the forties.

Blodwen's hair betrayed a certain vanity, for it was not his own. Even an expert would have looked twice, however, before discovering the fact that he wore a wig.

The call to dinner interrupted her acceptance of Blodwen's invitation, and it was later in the evening before she saw him again. The promenade deck had been cleared of steamer chairs and a dance was in progress. The soft strains of a waltz floated to the ears of Blodwen as he leaned idly against the steamer's rail just aft of the bridge and watched the thin wisp of smoke from his cigar drift in wavy lines toward the stern of the *Isota*. A crescent moon hanging low in the western sky silvered the millpond calm of the Pacific with a broad path of beauty that stretched from the steamer's rail to the far horizon.

The *Isota* seemed to glide through the dividing waters with scarcely a whisper from the white line of foam rushing smoothly past the black hull twenty feet below where he stood. Only the relentless throb of mighty heart-beats told of the driving force that urged the vessel onward. Lulled by the calm serenity of the night, Blodwen forgot for the first time during the voyage the little oilskin packet pinned to the inside pocket of his vest.

The clear tones of a woman's voice startled him from his reverie.

"I have come to claim your promise of this afternoon."

He turned quickly. Mrs. Meredith stood at his elbow. With a quick motion he tossed his half-smoked cigar overboard.

"You need not have done that," she protested. "I don't object to cigar-smoke."

"So you are really in earnest about learning to play chess?" asked Blodwen.

"Certainly. Why not? Do you consider me too stupid?"

"No, no, not that. Your request surprized me because I thought that your taste for amusement favored more active pastimes."

"You thought that I had rather dance, for instance?"

"Something like that, yes."

"Thanks for your candor. But, really, your games with Mr. Coburn this afternoon completely fascinated me. I feel that I simply must learn chess."

"The game is difficult."

"I am not frightened."

"Then when would you like to begin?"

"Now."

Blodwen was surprized at Mrs. Meredith's haste. He had taught chess to many people, but he had never found a woman so eager to learn the game. He glanced at his watch.

"It is already nine o'clock," he said.

"Then the sooner we start the better. That is, unless you repent of your bargain."

Blodwen laughed negatively and offered his arm. Side by side they descended the broad companionway into one of the *Isota's* brilliantly lighted parlors. A steward was dispatched to bring chessboard and men from the smoking-room while Mrs. Meredith and Blodwen seated themselves at opposite sides of a small mahogany table to await his return.

The cabin furnishings of the *Isota* were as new as the ship itself. Tapestries, rugs, pictures and bric-à-brac proclaimed by their spotlessness a recent origin. Even the rosewood box brought by the steward and its contents of ebony and boxwood chessmen were new. The green-and-white chessboard shone in its first coat of virgin varnish.

"How gallant they look!" commented Mrs. Meredith as Blodwen arranged the pieces on their proper squares.

He recalled the battered chessmen that he had seen in the chess clubs of the world and smiled ironically.

"In a few months," he remarked, "the knights will be noseless, the battlements of the rooks will be chipped off and the pawns will have grown dingy with much handling. These little armies, so spotless now, will soon become dilapidated and disreputable."

Mrs. Meredith gave a little shiver of annoyance.

"B-r-r-r!" she exclaimed. "You make me think of Time and Death. Cheer up and tell me their names again."

Blodwen laughed and cast aside the feeling of oppression that had suddenly come over him as he entered the cabin. Chess was a favorite pastime with him, and he exerted himself to make it so with Mrs. Meredith. He explained carefully the powers of the pieces, their manner of moving, gave illustrations of "check" and "checkmate," and grew more and more surprized to find Mrs. Meredith an eager and attentive pupil.

Time passed quickly. The influx of passengers into the cabin told that the evening's dance was over. He looked questioningly at Mrs. Meredith, but she shook her head.

"Please don't stop yet," she pleaded.

Mrs. Meredith's maid came and stood behind her mistress. She was young and of the type known as "dressy." Her proximity seemed to exasperate Mrs. Meredith.

"Go away; you distract my attention," she said petulantly. "Stand behind Mr. Blodwen. See if you can make him nervous."

Obediently the girl carried out her mistress' order. Blodwen glanced up. The maid's face seemed unnaturally pale in the light of the cabin lamps, but except for that he hardly noticed her. The three were alone in the parlor now. Blodwen glanced at his watch. It was one o'clock.

"Just one more game," begged Mrs. Meredith. "If you give me your queen again I think I can almost beat you."

Blodwen smiled agreeably and assembled the pieces. The maid, who had remained standing behind him, shifted her position slightly. A subtle perfume, oddly familiar, stole from her hair or clothing. What was there about the smell that reminded him of a hospital ward?

The air in the cabin seemed close. He was becoming drowsy. In spite of himself his head nodded. He roused sufficiently to see if Mrs. Meredith had observed his sleepiness. Her blond head was bent forward, her eyes intent on the chessboard.

Blodwen drew a long breath. Decidedly there was something wrong with the cabin's ventilation. He thought that the girl behind him had moved nearer. Did he dream, or had her soft arm stolen around his neck?"

IT WAS daylight when Blodwen opened his eyes. He was in his own stateroom, fully dressed, lying awkwardly, half in, half out of his berth. His cabin door stood open, and on the threshold a Japanese steward bowed politely.

"A wireless for the Mr. Blodwen," he said, extending an envelope.

Blodwen's brain cleared rapidly. Instinctively he knew what had happened. As a matter of form he felt for the oilskin packet that should have reposed in the inside pocket of his vest although he knew beforehand that the package would be missing.

With the certainty of his loss came returning strength. He sprang suddenly to his feet and confronted the steward.

"Look, boy!" he demanded. "Who brought me here last night?"

The Japanese, startled from his smiling complacency, shrugged his shoulders and shook his head negatively.

"I find the Mr. Blodwen's key in the door just now."

Assured by the boy's attitude that he spoke the truth and knew nothing of the night's happenings, Blodwen made no attempt to question him further but took the envelope that the steward still patiently extended toward him. He tore it open. Three short sentences stretched across the sheet:

> A Mrs. Meredith aboard. She may know of the "Double Thirteen." Watch out.

Blodwen smiled ironically. The warning had come too late.

The effects of the drug that had robbed him of consciousness were not lasting; for he found himself steady on his feet, and his active brain raced with plans for the recovery of his property. He faced the situation with calmness, indulging in no self-recrimination. His carelessness had brought its own punishment.

For a moment his thoughts dwelt on Mrs. Meredith. It was perfectly plain to him now that behind her desire to learn the game lurked an ulterior motive. Now that she had accomplished her object she would turn to other forms of amusement. It would have surprized him to know that Mrs. Meredith had that morning borrowed from the ship's library a volume of Hoyle containing a section devoted to the royal pastime, which, together with the chessmen, she had taken to her stateroom.

Without questioning the steward further Blodwen sought the captain of the ship.

Captain Matsu, commanding officer of the *Isota*, a graduate of Oxford, with an inordinate pride in his English university training, acknowledged Blodwen's self-introduction with a perfect imitation of a Briton's bluntness and listened imperturbably to his story.

Slightly excited, Blodwen was nevertheless calm enough to place his facts before the captain in logical sequence.

"To begin with," he said, "I represent the firm of Pendergast & Hartley, diamond importers, of New York City. My position with them is that of confidential agent, or buyer. I buy diamonds.

"Acting under instructions from my firm, I recently purchased from the Russian Princess Marya Mamontovna the diamond necklace known as the Double Thirteen. This necklace, composed of twenty-six small but perfectly matched and flawless diamonds, is justly celebrated as one of the world's finest. I carried it in an oilskin envelope pinned to the inside pocket of my vest. Last night the necklace was stolen."

Captain Matsu's face had not changed expression during Blodwen's brief recital, but now he smiled in a manner meant to be sympathetic.

"Well?" he asked as Blodwen hesitated.

Blodwen blushed. It humiliated him to have to tell how easily he had been tricked, but he continued his narrative.

"I had been playing chess in the cabin with Mrs. Meredith, one of the passengers, and as it was late I had grown sleepy—so sleepy in fact that I could hardly keep my eyes open. Mrs. Meredith's maid stood behind my chair, and now in the light of after events I am convinced that she was slowly and skilfully drugging my senses with some powerful narcotic. At any rate I gradually lost consciousness and have no further recollection of what took place. I awoke this morning in my stateroom with a steward calling my name and offering me this."

He handed the Marconigram to the captain.

The Japanese officer's face wrinkled into a frown. He looked up from the message to study his passenger more carefully. Blodwen's jaw was squared with determination. His eyes sparkled with subdued passion.

The captain realized that in spite of the simple manner in which he had been hoodwinked Blodwen was far from being a fool. He realized also that Blodwen would be insistent in his demands for assistance in the recovery of his necklace, an assistance which Captain Matsu was none too willing to give. It was the *Isota's* first voyage, and the steamship was his first command. He desired if possible to avoid any inconvenience to his passengers that might cause sensation or scandal.

"This woman must be clever," he said thoughtfully.

"She is," answered Blodwen, his tone leaving no doubt in his hearer's mind as to the sincerity of his belief in her cleverness.

"You should have placed the necklace in the safekeeping of the purser."

Blodwen's face reddened at the rebuke.

"In my eighteen years' experience of travel with valuable jewels I have never lost anything but once. That was when I entrusted my property to the ship's safe."

The captain's eyes lifted questioningly, and Blodwen hastened to explain.

"The ship was wrecked. The passengers escaped with what valuables they were able to take with them, but the strong-box went to the bottom of the sea."

"That experience was unusual. In the long run your jewels would have been safer in the purser's charge than in your pockets."

"Possibly. But that's neither here nor there. The fact remains that the necklace has been stolen, and I demand your assistance in its recovery."

"What would you have me do?"

"Search Mrs. Meredith, her maid, her stateroom and her effects."

The captain shook his head.

"Were I to do that it would necessitate the searching of every man, woman and child on board the *Isota*. I could not subject Mrs. Meredith to the indignity of a search without doing the same to every one else."

"Then you refuse?"

"I have not said so. I merely tell you the difficulty of following your suggestion. A better way to recover the diamonds would be to wait until we reach port. Your American Customs officials, duly warned of the missing diamonds, would conduct a thorough search."

Blodwen had thought more than once of the Customs Service as a possible hindrance to the successful landing of the stolen jewels, but he was impatient. He wanted an immediate search of the ship.

"I have great confidence in the efficiency of your Customs officers, Mr. Blodwen. I doubt if the Double Thirteen can be smuggled ashore after they have been told of its presence on board."

But Blodwen was insistent that the captain conduct a search, which he more and more firmly refused to do. And since no command is more imperialistic than that of a Japanese captain over his ship Blodwen was compelled to depart at last with his request ungratified.

For the next few days Blodwen haunted the vicinity of Mrs. Meredith's stateroom, but she confined herself inside, refusing to be seen. Notes sent in by a bribed stewardess were returned unopened.

On the afternoon of the third day of his vigil, Blodwen was amazed to see the stateroom door open and Barney Coburn emerge.

"What are you doing in there?" he demanded excitedly, seizing the young Irishman by the elbow.

In surprize Coburn shook himself free. Then as Blodwen apologized for his rudeness he smiled.

"Playing chess," he replied.

"Look out for her," warned Blodwen. "She probably has designs on your purse. She's a woman of the world and will bear watching."

"Don't worry about me," laughed Coburn. "I'm sophisticated and penniless. She can't do me any harm. But as far as chess is concerned her game is improving. She studies the openings continually and this afternoon she actually beat me playing the white end of an Evans Gambit. By the way, you and I haven't played lately. Want to have a few games before dinner?"

Blodwen held up his hand and shook his head.

"I'm off chess for life," he answered.

THE long voyage drew toward its close. Morning succeeded morning with the same red sun rising from the same smooth sea. Noon followed noon with the great glowing disk of copper hanging motionless above the *Isota's* black funnels. Hot afternoons drifted into cool nights with the same daily lengthening of shadows along the deck as the sun sank slowly to the western horizon and disappeared at last into the steamer's glittering wake.

On the morning of the sixteenth day the eastern rim of the ocean was topped by the irregular outlines of distant mountains; and shortly before noon the *Isota* steamed in through the Golden Gate.

Blodwen, all impatience, fumed at the quarantine delay and paced the deck like a caged animal. As the *Isota* slowly docked his nervousness increased. His face was haggard as he scanned the faces on the wharf; and he sighed with relief when after careful scrutiny he failed to recognize any one.

For ten minutes Blodwen poured his story into the ears of Gilvrain of the Customs Service. Gilvrain, who for thirty years had worn the blue of a Customs inspector, listened in silence, and when Blodwen had finished, stood in deep thought before making any comment.

"The situation is this, Mr. Blodwen," he said at last. "This Mrs. Meredith, as you call her, is an old hand at evading the customs. She has been at it so long that she knows how nearly impossible it will be for her to bring anything ashore without our knowing its nature. Where an unsuspected person might land practically without molestation she on the contrary will be subjected to a most rigorous search. And this fact she knows as well as I do.

"What she will unquestionably attempt is to have the necklace brought ashore by some confederate who will be unknown to you and unsuspected by us. I will personally supervise the inspection of the passengers and I will guarantee that the Double Thirteen will never leave the *Isota* in Mrs. Meredith's possession or in that of her maid; but you can readily see how impossible it will be for us to thoroughly search each individual of the steamer's nine hundred passengers."

Blodwen nodded.

At that moment his roving glance caught sight of Barney Coburn at the rail of the ship. He plucked at the inspector's sleeve, directing his attention toward the young Irishman.

"It is possible that that gentleman at the rail may be the confederate you spoke of," he suggested.

The inspector started with surprize as he caught sight of the man Blodwen indicated.

"I'll give him a careful search," he said.

Blodwen thought there was a ghost of a smile on the inspector's face as he turned away to begin his duties.

Three hours later Gilvrain came to Blodwen, who was impatiently fuming in the smoking-room.

"No trace," said the inspector laconically.

"What became of Mrs. Meredith?" asked Blodwen.

"She left the wharf in a big limousine as soon as we were through with her."

"But she should have been arrested!" exclaimed Blodwen, jumping up excitedly.

"That would have been a mistake. As it is, I am having her watched, and whenever she is joined by her confederate they will both be nabbed. Believe me, Mr. Blodwen, that is the only way to recover your necklace."

"How about Coburn?"

"He is still aboard the ship. But I will vouch for him. He had absolutely nothing to do with the theft of the Double Thirteen."

Blodwen's faith in the Customs Service dwindled. Half an hour later it disappeared altogether when Gilvrain's man reported to him that Mrs. Meredith had made good her escape. Blodwen decided that it was high time to take a hand himself in the recovery of his diamonds. Mrs. Meredith must still be in the city. There were methods of tracing her out. He sat down at a table, burying his face in his hands to think.

Gilvrain had said that the diamonds would probably be taken ashore by some one of the passengers, some one above suspicion. In that case it was possible that the necklace might still be on board the *Isota.* Customs officials never searched an outgoing vessel. Their activities were always confined to new arrivals. Might it not be possible that Mrs. Meredith had hidden the necklace somewhere in her stateroom? If such were the case, how simple it would be for her to engage the same room for the outward passage ten days or two weeks later and then to come aboard on the sailing date and remove the necklace at her leisure! A search of the stateroom might prove worth while.

THIS train of thought was interrupted by a disturbance in the smoking-room. Two white-jacketed stewards were in loud altercation in their incomprehensible jargon. From words their argument grew to blows, and the larger of the two soon drove the smaller flying up the broad companionway to the deck. The second steward, as if nothing unusual had happened, began to move quietly about, brushing ashes from the tables and otherwise putting the room in order.

Engrossed in his own troubles, Blodwen had paid no attention to the quarrel of the stewards. His mind made up, he sprang to his feet, determined to seek the captain of the ship and enlist his aid in a thorough search of Mrs. Meredith's stateroom.

As he crossed from his chair to the companionway the steward paused before the the chessboard where the pieces had been hastily shoved into a heap at the conclusion of last evening's play and gathered them into their rosewood box. Then instead of placing the box back on the shelf he tucked it under his arm and followed Blodwen up the stairs.

On the deck evening shadows had begun to stretch black arms across the promenade. Against the white row of staterooms, clearly outlined by the level rays of the setting sun, the crossed lines of the steamer's cordage wove an intricate pattern like the web of a gigantic spider.

Blodwen was surprized at the hush on deck. A few hours before, the bulwarks had hedged in a crowd of eager passengers. Now the rail swung in a deserted curve back past the bulge of the cabin toward the stern of the ship. Passengers had vanished; but, leaning against the ladder that led upward to the pilot-house and the hurricane deck, Captain Matsu was talking excitedly to a steward.

It was quiet on the upper decks of the *Isota*, but from the hold and from the dock echoed the ceaseless crash of the steamer's unloading. From below an endless stream of man-propelled trucks emptied to the wharf, clattering and rumbling away into the shadowy distances of the barn-like dock-sheds. Scattered arc lamps cast a fitful glare upon the dim figures moving like a procession of gnomes or pixies into the far corners of the structure. Among the countless bales and boxes thus disappearing from his view Blodwen wondered if any individual package secreted the Double Thirteen.

The clank of a windlass and the sound of a donkey engine drowned out for a moment the rumbling of trucks. A huge packing-case, large enough to contain a piano, lumbered across the wide gangplank, a stevedore on either side to steady it and a giant longshoreman pushing the truck on which it rode.

Blodwen, watching idly, saw a fourth man step out from behind its shelter as the wheels of the truck clattered on the wharf. The flash of the man's white jacket as he dodged for an instant into the light of an arc lamp identified him as one of the *Isota's* stewards.

His evident desire to escape observation aroused Blodwen's suspicions. Acting on a sudden impulse, he turned and hurried down the gangplank, eyes searching for the retreating figure now vanished in the gloom of the great shed.

For a moment he thought that the man had given him the slip. Then, as his eyes accustomed themselves to the partial darkness, he saw a distant gleam of white and quickened his steps. At the next arc lamp the gap between himself and the white jacket had materially lessened. He was almost at the steward's heels when the Jap reached the outskirts of the shed and turned abruptly to the right, passing into the street through a narrow door, almost concealed from view by a pile of packing-cases. Blodwen, following swiftly, stopped himself by catching the door-frame as he heard a familiar voice ask—

"Have you got them?"

It was still light enough in the street for Blodwen, peering through the open doorway, to recognize the well-tailored figure of Mrs. Meredith. She stood on the curbstone of a narrow sidewalk, one foot resting on the running-board of a big black limousine, whose throbbing bulk completely filled the cramped roadway from warehouse to warehouse. She was tendering a banknote to the steward, who in return extended a rosewood box toward Mrs. Meredith. Blodwen sprang through the doorway and snatched the box from the fingers of the astonished Jap.

"Just a minute, boy," he said coolly. "I want to know what you have in this box."

He snapped back the cover and to his

disappointment saw that it contained nothing but a set of chessmen. Mrs. Meredith, from whose nerveless fingers the bill had fluttered to the sidewalk, recovered her poise.

"You startled me, Mr. Blodwen!" she exclaimed, bending quickly and retrieving the bank-note, which Blodwen saw was a twenty. "I was buying the *Isota's* chessmen. I have taken quite a fancy to them."

"Yes, missy buy chessmen," announced the steward eagerly.

For a moment Blodwen was nonplused. His brain was at work, however. Why should Mrs. Meredith wish to own this particular set of chessmen when others just as good could be purchased for less than half the price at a dozen stores in San Francisco?

"Come, boy. Here's your money. I'm in a hurry."

Blodwen was conscious of a troubled note in Mrs. Meredith's voice. His grasp on the rosewood box tightened.

"I've taken a sudden fancy to these particular men myself," he said, turning to the steward. "Mrs. Meredith offers you twenty dollars for the box. I'll give you twenty-five."

"Thirty," snapped Mrs. Meredith.

Blodwen was sure of his ground now. He smiled pleasantly and bid—

"Thirty-five."

From his place at the wheel of the car the chauffeur leaped suddenly to the ground. Out of the corner of his eye Blodwen caught the gleam of brass knuckles as the man sprang upon him. He dodged back, but the driver's swinging fist swept away both cap and wig. At the same instant a street lamp overhead flashed suddenly to life.

Without his wig Blodwen became a different individual.

"Baldy O'Toole!" gasped his assailant.

Recognition was mutual.

"Jerry Teegan!" exclaimed Blodwen.

Mrs. Meredith took in the changed aspect of the situation at a glance.

"Here's your money," she said, extending the twenty to the steward, who had remained standing by the door of the warehouse, an interested spectator in the whirl of events.

"Now, O'Toole," she ordered, holding the door of the car wide.

"Jump in, Baldy," added the chauffeur. "And meet Kate M'Coy, the slickest little diamond smuggler in the world."

"But the Double Thirteen," protested the bogus Blodwen.

"In the box with the chessmen."

"That's what I thought," muttered O'Toole, and stepped in through the door.

In the shadows he saw a second female figure—Mrs. Meredith's maid. Mrs. Meredith herself followed him into the tonneau. Teegan sprang to the driver's seat.

"To the Imperial," ordered Mrs. Meredith.

Came a roar from the exhaust, and the black car leaped away toward the mouth of the narrow street.

The Japanese steward had stepped forward as the chauffeur sprang to the wheel, but when Mrs. Meredith spoke he dropped back into the shadows. Now as the car whirled around the corner he followed after at a run. Thirty seconds later he was at the public telephone in the drug-store across the avenue. His voice as he spoke over the wire had none of the accents of a Japanese. On the contrary it was sharp, authoritative and thoroughly American.

"Captain Prentiss," the voice said, "this is Barney Coburn of the Secret Service. Send a squad of men to the Imperial at once and arrest two men and two women who will arrive there shortly in a black limousine. The men you know. They are Baldy O'Toole and Jerry Teegan. One of the women is known as Kate M'Coy. The name of the second is immaterial. She'll be with the others. Hold them on some kind of a charge until you hear from me."

Twenty minutes later Barney Coburn, without his white jacket, his face red from scrubbing away the stain that had dyed his skin, sat at one of the card-tables in the smoking-room of the *Isota*. Facing him was his friend Gilvrain of the Customs Service.

"It was by chance that I happened to be in at the death," explained Coburn. "I had been on a special mission to Japan and with my work accomplished was returning home on the *Isota*. With no cares on my mind the voyage was like a vacation. I played chess with the so-called Blodwen, danced with Mrs. Meredith.

"Then the steamer docked. Simultaneously with its arrival came the cablegram from the real Blodwen telling how he had been robbed and held prisoner in that hell-hole in Yokohama. You suggested that I arrest O'Toole at once, but according to his story to you the necklace was no longer in his possession. Mrs. Meredith, second thief of the Double Thirteen, became, according to the old saw, its 'best owner.'

"There is a certain amount of humor in the whole story. O'Toole, masquerading as the real Blodwen, with the diamonds safe in his pocket, never suspected that Mrs. Meredith was in the same business as himself until he got that Marconigram from Blodwen's firm. Then it was too late. Mrs. Meredith had the necklace.

"O'Toole was in a difficult situation. He did a remarkably nervy thing. He appealed to Captain Matsu and to the Customs Service, forces representing law and order, to assist him in the recovery of stolen property. Both failed him.

"Further complicating his position, an event occurred about which he knew nothing. The real Blodwen escaped three days before O'Toole had planned that he should.

"At this point I enter the picture. With the knowledge that the Double Thirteen had passed from the hands of the bogus Blodwen into those of the masquerading Mrs. Meredith the rest was easy. It only remained to discover where she had hidden it and how she planned to get it ashore."

Coburn paused.

"And how was it done?"

"Mrs. Meredith's sudden and unaccountable interest in the game of chess gave me the clew. If she had discarded the game after securing the diamonds I might have suspected that her only interest in chess was to gain the acquaintance of O'Toole. But she continued to study the game until the steamship docked. Consequently when I heard your story I watched the *Isota's* chessmen as a jealous miser watches his hoard. When the steward came to take them away I substituted for him and delivered the men to Mrs. Meredith in person."

"Then she has them now?"

Coburn grinned. He stretched out a hand to the shelf where the games were stored and lifted a rosewood box.

"The *Isota* is especially well equipped," he said. "She has two sets of chessmen."

He opened the box and poured its contents out on the table. By this time Gilvrain, wise in the Customs Service, knew what was coming. He smiled as Coburn began to operate on the chessmen.

With strong fingers Coburn tore the green felt covering from the bottom of the black king and with the point of his penknife picked at the circular plug that appeared beneath it. The wood came loose in his hand, and he noted that the thin coating of lead that had been used to weight the piece and keep it upright had been scraped away. He shook the king, and from the orifice a ball of tightly wadded cotton slipped to the palm of his hand.

Industriously he worked at the bottoms of the other pieces while Gilvrain looked on with a broadening smile. In a few minutes Coburn's palm held twenty-six bits of cotton wool. He tore at the wadding with eager fingers. Above his head the cabin lamps cast their glare downward, and from their snowy shrouds a handful of small, hard substances, many-faceted, gleamed up at him, reflecting the light in dazzling prismatic colors.

THE ROLLING STONE

by Edgar Young

Author of "A Few Will Remember," "Units of Value," etc.

ROBERT KEENE was a rolling stone. He had rolled from coast to coast of the States, far beyond Hudson Bay in Canada, down through the interior of Africa, across Russia, China, Old Mexico, Central and South America. As he rolled along he had worked, as needs must, at various trades, occupations and professions. Also he had studied much and deep.

He was wise. He had come to know many facts that beat themselves into lonely brains lying sleepless under the stars away from the haunts of men. It is then the mind gropes far into the unknown. Things that appear too difficult for human comprehension are solved with ease. The philosopher on the lonely trail learns to view things as totalities, to get away and obtain a better perspective of problems.

Protoplasm he sees as the gigantic body of some colossal form of life; individual souls as tiny jewels in it. The beast of the field, the tree, the insect, all are linked with himself. The soul of each is of the stuff of his own. It is only a difference of degree. Such things are simple as A-B-C to him.

He ponders and asks why does Mother Earth put forth this teeming life upon her broad bosom. What expediency has caused this? Erotism, adornment, protection, or what? Protoplasmic life he knows is governed by the law of expediency. He visualizes towering vegetation mounting to enormous heights. He has seen coal veins twenty feet thick, compressed through ages under millions of tons of earth, which were formed by such vegetation.

He has tried to visualize conditions in those ages past, when vegetal life was supreme on the earth, living upon itself and upon the chemicals of the earth's crust, gifted with intelligence—greedy. Animal life could not exist, would be smothered, until plant life began to destroy itself. Then had come, from some peculiar cycle of expediency, huge flying lizards hundreds of feet long; elephant-like animals of colossal proportions; birds of mammoth dimensions; giant creatures to thunder over the earth, to fly above it, to crawl beneath its surface—thriving upon the oxygen which was an excrement of plant life.

He has wondered whence, how, and why had come the *Genus Homo Sapiens*, half-animal, half-god, to take control of plant life in one hand and animal life in the other—the happy medium, the helper in the process of evolution. And, feeling a responsibility as such, a turner of the wheel without knowing whither the great vehicle moves, he has become fearless, hopeful. It is only the coward mind that fears to think, and the fat intellect that comes out by the same door it went in at.

But to return to Robert Keene. As a man of thirty-five he was something of a genius, reckoned by any standards. He was a passable philosopher, a thorough biologist, an expert chemist, a shrewd psychologist,

This is an Off-the-Trail story. See first contents page.

an eminent theologian. He was the possessor of various other uncanny facts and stray bits of learning he had gleaned from the minds of men and from the books of nature.

He was human enough to want his portion of this world's goods mainly because at times he needed money to make certain experiments, buy certain books, or to meet and talk with a man he thought knew something he wished to find out. Yet by a certain twist of his nature he wanted to make money his own way. It is true he often worked for little or nothing to outfit for a trip, or to get passage money to some other part of the world. He had been offered good money to take some position permanently, but had smilingly refused.

Work delayed him. Ordinary human endeavor was distasteful to him except as a means to an end. He was not lazy, he did labor much along his own lines. He walked thousands of miles. He dug for weeks with pick and shovel to see what was under some crumbling ruin. He hid in the jungles for months spying out the habits of animals, birds, and insects. He scaled cliffs and peered off of mountains. He explored the interior of yawning caves in the earth. He beat up tons of various sorts of rocks to see what they were made of. He analyzed saps and gums.

No danger held him back. He had been among savage tribes and had fought them, himself fierce as a savage and more cunning when they interfered with what he was doing. From fifteen to thirty-five he had lived twenty years of life packed with incident.

When he arrived at a certain Andean copper-mining camp his hair was hanging two feet down his back. Chance had brought him to the camp, the chance of a few grains of corn dropped on a llama path many days distant from the camp. The company had bought corn from a tribe of Indians living far down the side of the eastern slopes of the mountains. A sack had leaked and he had followed, picking up and eating the grains, over barren stretches and through bleak mountain passes.

He was on the fag end of a long trip. He had walked the incredible distance from Rio de Janeiro, the entire width of the South American continent, a matter of two thousand miles as a crow flies, and for the most part through unknown and unexplored territory. The jaunt had taken him eighteen months.

He had run out of ammunition and had thrown away his carbine and revolver and was carrying a Cashibo blow-gun, a roll of tiny darts like knitting-needles, an immense bow, and a bundle of large, bone-barbed arrows. These he had taken from an Indian who had stalked him for days for his flesh and head. More cunning than the Indian, he had sprung from the fork of a tree and had throttled the savage with his bare hands.

His clothes were in tatters, tied with strings of beaten bark, patched with bits of skin of beast and fowl. He could scarcely speak English from not having spoken it in so long.

He tarried not to bandy useless words with men who stared open-mouthed as he stumbled down the road in front of the office buildings and storerooms. He knew the place had a company mess-house, and when he had sighted it he turned off the main road and cut across the lot to the door. To an apron-clad American he made known the fact that he had not had a square meal for months.

He was given food at a little kitchen table in the corner. The animal within him grew ravenous. He ate greedily, sucking and smacking over it in an ecstasy of enjoyment; then, as his straining nerves relaxed, he went sound asleep, sprawled over his plate.

Rough men came and stared curiously at him and while he slept they bathed, shaved, and doctored him with salves and ointments, then put him to bed. His subconscious self had relaxed.

This subconscious self had not slept an instant in eighteen months. It had remained awake, watchful, even when his body was deep in slumber, rousing him at the slightest sound of danger. He slept for two days and two nights without waking.

At last, when he did arouse, he found new clothes on a chair beside his cot. Within a few days he was at work, bossing a gang of Quechua laborers at the ore tipple. He became "one of the bunch," a strange bunch, birds of passage, T. T. T.'s, contract men.

Men crowded near him in the club of evenings when they gathered after the day's work, and asked him eagerly of the long hike. He told the story simply.

He had walked the Estrada Centrâl from Rio de Janeiro to São José dos Campos, four hundred miles from Rio, and from there—he stepped to a wall map and indidicated an east and west course across Brazil and into the interior of Peru.

He spoke of the jungles, silent, dim as twilight at noon; the swamps and deserts; the mighty rivers and rapid streams; the vast Andes, slashed and gashed with yawning cañons, buttressed with cliffs, pitted with great caverns, spanning from tropic heat to perpetual ice. He spoke of the dangers of his lone struggle, the caution he had used, the grim fighting he had done with wild men and with wild nature. Yet, when some one let slip a question why he had made this trip he started to answer, then kept silent.

In a couple of months curiosity of the crowd toward him waned, for which he was modestly thankful. He became apparently a cog of the company machine whose business was to mine and ship out copper to the civilized world.

Yet with his renewed strength he had begun anew to pilgrimage into unknown fields of thought. He managed to get a small cottage on the hill above the smelter for his own use, one of the three-room cottages set apart for married employees. Several were vacant.

Here Keene did a staggering amount of work of evenings and at night. Often he worked far into the morning hours. Water, earth, air, fire, ice, metal, insect, plant—he experimented with them, tested, dissolved, took them to pieces, and divided the cells, to find out the laws that govern them.

He discovered that down to an infinity of minuteness each cell was composed of others bound together yet possessing individual force. Animal and plant cells had an intelligence suitable to their needs, living their own lives but adding to the total life of whatever they composed. Each cell had its own supply of force, revolved on its axis, went through phases, and was a world unto itself.

Some of these things had been touched upon by scientists. Keene went deep, deep, to the bottom. He connected animate with inanimate, vegetal with animal life, the earth with our universe, our universe with other universes.

He got hold of facts that hitherto were unknown, although men had almost grasped them. Keene proved them by chemistry, with mathematics, by faultless deduction. He lay hold of the exact laws that govern all things.

He was amazed at the revelations his work had disclosed. He had found rules by which he could understand almost anything he attempted to fathom. He stood in awe of the magnitude of these laws, their dovetailed perfection from an infinity of smallness through the gamut to an infinity of greatness. He became the greatest intellect of his time; he was aware of this.

Keene did not feel a swelling egoism. He knew too much to give undue value to any one person. One man, even though that man be himself, was too small an atom in the scheme of things for him to thrill over.

He did feel, however, a responsibility, terrific in its gravity, that rested upon him. He saw, and saw plainly, things that would help mankind and through it animalkind and vegetalkind. He saw methods to hasten the march of protoplasm upon the earth, to speed evolution toward the goal of perfection, to make man more of a man and less of a beast.

NOW he began to frequent the club. He took better care of his person. He cultivated friendships. From seclusion he came out and bubbled with sociability.

When some one asked about a detail of his travels he dilated upon them. He spoke of men and women and things of other lands. With sweeping strokes of clear-cut English he painted scenes and events, and held his friends spellbound.

This all was a part of his plan. He knew the history of man. He was well aware that humankind is wary of thoughts a trifle beyond the narrow limits of any particular period, that it kills, crucifies, burns at the stake, destroys the life of men ahead of their time in thought.

Future generations judge coldly the acts of their predecessors. They build monuments to men the mob has torn to pieces and scorned. But they, in turn, are ready to fall upon similar men in their own midst.

Robert Keene did not wish to be a martyr. He wanted to live to be of use, to help lighten the burdens of humanity, to strike off a few false shackles, to throw a few beams of light along the way.

It was with superhuman cunning that he began to put the balance of his scheme into effect. He started to interject words, phrases, expressions, thoughts, into his talks that would bring out some natural or biological fact, some intellectual gem, some truth that would live until the end of time. He casually mentioned that certain portions of South America were in the midst of remote ages of evolution. He showed that animal life and vegetal life had taken strange turns in such places, and that present-day descendants of supposedly extinct flora and fauna existed, differing but little from those of three million years ago, while others also existed which were easily three million years ahead of any other part of the world.

He mentioned plants that closed upon small animals and insects and devoured them, of other parasitic plants that moved of their own volition from place to place on tree trunks, of others that grew hollow pods or knots in which to house certain venomous or vicious insects to protect them; he mentioned the reproduction of each kind, and the hybrids that have formed to start other species.

He went into many descriptions about animals, birds, and reptiles he had observed; giant toads whose sweat of anger is a deadly poison, other toads whose pores are used as an incubator for their eggs, lizards which half fly and half walk over the water, cannibal fish, snakes of unbelievable length, myriad forms of bird life, monstrous apes and wild men hitherto unknown, tiny worms and insects of amazing shapes and propensities. The facts were almost incredible.

However, the men who had drifted to this camp were a broad-minded lot. They themselves were rolling stones who had seen things and had thought. They connected these descriptions with similar things they themselves had seen.

From English-speaking countries they had come, and from all other countries where white men hold sway. The experience of any twenty of them would span the earth's crust.

There were among them an English lord; a professor who had held a chair of language in Oxford and later had been a private tutor to a prince of the Punjab in India; a German count—an Imperial spy—who secretly was a high official of one of the largest steamship companies in the world; a man who had been president of a bank in Denver; a chemist who had taught his subject twenty-nine years in one of the best colleges in the United States; a former big-league ball-player; a renowned pistol champion.

Others had been experts in various lines; some were hoboes and a few were plain bums. Some had pasts that came in whispers from the outside. Some expected futures in quick promotion to high salaries caused by the short stay that many men made at this high, bleak, wind-swept camp. All in all they were a good lot. The bond of good-fellowship was strong.

Yet broad-minded as they were, intellectual as they were, experienced as they were, they began to doubt the deductions that Keene arrived at, because he went a trifle beyond their depths. He saw in their eyes and read in their faces this vague, unformed doubt tinged with an incomprehensible trace of anger for having made the plunge. This grew more pronounced as he proceeded with his talks. They listened carefully to actual descriptions, but when he tried to make a point from such data they walked away.

Keene moved back to the bachelor quarters. He tried to give his knowledge to them individually. He tried by sheer force of argument to compel an acceptance of his facts and logic. He continued to frequent the club and to devise plans to make his words interesting without resorting to actual fiction or lying.

Men began to look curiously at the others and at him when he talked. Keene watched these reactions carefully. He could frame words to express what he did not hear:

"It's too bad; he's a trifle off; he's been hit by the sun. The trail hammered him too hard. He's missed too many boats."

Keene noted that the camp surgeon, a former Panama Canal man, closely observed his bodily reflexes and coordinations. He was being passed upon by a jury which was half convinced of his insanity.

This cut deep. These men *were* his own kind of man. They were rolling stones—his class. But he was the master rolling stone, the master rambler of them all.

And he was the thinker. Where they had just punctured the shell of mass thought he had plunged through and had probed the universe. He was not trying to sell them anything. He was trying to give away knowledge. He was an intellectual good fellow striving to lend a helping hand with what he knew.

It hurt him to see the antagonism in minds and faces. It was a hard slap in the face. He knew some men did in reality go insane when the best that was in them was unappreciated.

He worried over it, trying to solve the why of it. That it did exist there was no question. So he left off trying and withdrew into his shell. He moved back to the cottage, and bachelor quarters sighed in relief when he was gone.

There in the cottage he admitted that the first round had been against him. If this broad-minded gathering of men would not accept him what had he to hope from inexperienced, shallow-thinking groups? They would lock him up as unsound.

He was no quitter, this man. He was game to the marrow in his bones. He had won battles by fighting when he was whipped.

He began to look at his failure in an abstract way as if it was something apart from him. His reasoning had been faultless when he tried to impart knowledge. It was no mere babbling of loose words; he had weighed each one and he had seen them take effect. A trifle later had come the reaction against them and him.

Poverty! He had the solution. Poverty and wisdom were not synonymous. Men looked to the materially successful for words of wisdom.

This habit had begun five hundred thousand years ago around the common campfire of the hairy man ape. Those who had been successful or lucky in the chase with hurled stone or club were the center of attraction. Some meat might he left over. Those who had no food gathered around those who had, listening with awe-struck faces as the wise one with sundry grunts, clicks, growls, and whistles entertained them with narratives of prowess. The association of ideas had lasted down through the ages—Abundance and Wisdom.

Taking the angle of the others and looking at himself, Keene went into the matter coldly. A tramp who had hiked into the camp hungry, almost naked, men would naturally look upon with a certain association of ideas. They would like to know how he got food, how he slept, how he preserved his life, how he lasted through. It was hard to associate the events, the man, with real or superior knowledge.

Then he saw himself as a foreman over a gang of Indians. It was true he was paid a hundred and seventy-five dollars a month, but this was little compared to what other men received. He had noticed that men paid more attention to the ones who were nearer the top of the heap, and in almost direct proportion to their earnings. This was a truth, a sad, sordid truth.

Keene now began to spend his holidays and Sundays in strolling through the mountains. Lunch in pocket, geologist hammer in hand, he walked along studying the earth. He was not looking for biological or geological facts. He was looking for gold ore, diamonds, precious stones, minerals, things that men prized and paid hard cash for.

He left off talking to men, and they, duly thankful, took this as a new phase of his mental unbalance. Those who saw him sneaking from the camp on a prospecting-tour nudged each other and grinned. *That* sort of visionary had often been in their midst.

One day Keene was passing over a pile of coal ashes, back of the power-house, that the firemen had dumped there against the time the section foreman would consider the amount worth while to load on a flatcar and use as ballast for the track, or for making walks between the buildings. Keene stopped and stared fixedly at those coal cinders for several minutes. Stooping, he gathered up a handful and stuffed them into his pocket.

That night Keene went to the club-house. Big Bert Daley, general manager, was shooting a game of billiards with Charley Barron, commissary clerk. Keene saw him and edged over to Daley's elbow. When Bert stood, chalking his cue between shots, Keene touched his arm.

"Mr. Daley," he said confidentially, "I think those ashes over back of the power-house are valuable."

Big Bert put his hand on Keene's shoulder and looked at him shrewdly.

"Some more of that bug stuff, eh?" he said with rough kindness.

Then he lowered his voice.

"Keene, why don't you take a trip down to the coast and hang around for a couple of weeks? Take a rest. Take a tip, that hike you made was a hard one.

"This altitude is a strain on the heart and nerves. Seven pounds of air to the square inch isn't the fifteen pounds at sea-level. I feel it myself at times."

"Then you are not interested in the ashes?" Keene persisted.

Daley's face reddened. He slammed his cue butt against the floor.

"No!"

"Then I would like to have them, if you please."

Daley started as if to swear. He was a big man with a big temper. Also he had a big heart.

"All right; you can have them. You can have any other ashes you want. They have been a nuisance. Take them and get them out of the way."

"Remember, you gave them to me."

Daley nodded and leaned over the table to make his delayed shot. When he glanced back Keene had slipped out.

"That poor —— is off his trolley bad. I wouldn't be surprized if we don't have to ship him out of here soon. Ashes! I wonder what he imagines he can do with ashes? Reconstruct some vanished planet?"

He shook his head and laughed.

THE next day another man had Keene's gang of Quechuas. He had quit. As the bunch passed on the way to work some of them came over and watched Keene pottering around the pile of ashes. He was noncommittal. Asking among themselves, they learned he had been presented with the ashes. It was too bad. Bert Daley shouldn't have tried to humor him on this crazy scheme. It was really a shame. The man was crazy—bugs!

Keene paid little attention to them. He bought numerous pots and pans at the commissary and got to work. By night he had put a portion of the cinders through a process similar to panning gold. He had no gold, though.

Men had been curious enough to see just what he did save from the ashes, and could see nothing but a red liquid he kept pouring from each panful to another pan in which he saved it. In three days he had washed the whole pile and had evaporated the red liquid into a red powder which he molded into small tablets. In all he had about a quart bottle full.

That same night he drifted into the club. Men stopped whatever they were doing, looked at him and grinned. He walked down and stood at the fireplace watching Bert Daley shooting billiards. Bert Daley saw him there.

"Well, how's the ashes, Keene?" he asked, winking broadly to the chemist he was playing with, the ex-college instructor.

Keene took out a small pill-box in which he had a few of the tablets and tossed one upon the table. Daley picked it up and looked at it. It looked like the rough tablet into which iodin is first concentrated.

Daley smelled of it and passed it to the chemist. The chemist took his pocket glass out and studied it gravely. He never had seen anything just like it. Keene chuckled.

They both looked up at him. His grin was an unmistakable grin of confidence. He held a pat hand. This was no bluff.

"What in —— is that stuff?" asked Bert.

The chemist shook his head. Keene entered into an explanation. He told how a certain rare chemical, very valuable, was found now and then in coal ashes of certain sorts of coal in about three places in the world, and only at intervals in such veins.

The chemist bore witness to this fact. He had heard of this chemical and knew its name. And upon having Keene describe certain properties he agreed that this was it.

The crowd had gathered around the table when they saw something was happening. They took the tablet and passed it around and examined it. Few of them remembered the exact name but they remembered the value, for they heard Keene say in reply to a question from Daley that already he had about twenty thousand dollars' worth, and was going to take a look at the ashes along the track to see if by chance they were the right sort.

A week later he had run the amount he possessed up to thirty-five thousand dollars' worth, reckoned by the last quotation he had seen. He had been down to the Morobamba coal-mine, forty miles away, a company property, and made tests that proved the streak had played out for the time being.

He sent the parcel of chemical by registered mail to a firm of wholesale chemists he knew in New York and waited for a reply. While it was coming he hung around the camp, taking strolls into the mountains and pottering around the smelter.

At the end of a month Keene received a cable telling him to call at a bank in Lima for his money. The price had gone up.

The cable stated that fifty thousand awaited him. He hurried down behind the messenger and swung upon the platform of a coach as the train pulled out of the station.

In an hour the camp was agog with the news. The old chemist had known from the very night Keene had shown him the pellet that the find was a rich one. A few had taken his corroboration. But the majority had doubted. And with the passing of each day this doubt had grown. Now the word that Keene had gone to Lima to draw so great an amount passed from mouth to mouth throughout the camp and down into the deep labyrinths of the mines.

"What do you think about that fellow Keene? What do you *know* about that? Fifty thousand iron boys! Picking it out of an ash-pile! That old boy has got brains! Do you mean to say you haven't heard the news?"

Coca-chewing Quechua laborers asked the cause of the excitement and were told. Eyes rolled and heads wagged gravely. *Cincuenta mil pesos! Aí, Diós!* It was too vast for comprehension. The white gringos were a strange lot. The Señor Keene knew much.

As the excitement waned men remembered deep in their hearts of many ways in which they had mistreated Robert Keene. Sturdy-bodied, double-fisted, hairy-chested men blushed with memories of winks they had passed and smart sayings they had uttered at Keene's expense. The man had done them no harm. They had transgressed against their code—the square-deal code of the Open Road.

And brows knitted and men thought deeply of things that Keene had tried to tell them. There was not a soul who expected him back to the camp.

But he came back the next night. He carried a bag that bulged with the weight of money. The men gathered around him as he alighted from the train and followed him to the club-house.

Bert Daley was at the billiard-table practising. He strode down the room and grasped Keene's hand and blurted out his congratulations. The crowd trooped around them, and every man's face was beaming with pleasure. Keene laughed uproariously. Finally he began to talk.

"You men have got me into a nice fix. I'm a student. I've studied for twenty years. I study books, men, nature, everything. I know many things that no other man in the world has ever guessed. But when I try to tell you fellows about it you fly to conclusions that I'm crazy. You threw me down hard."

Keene's face grew wistful for a moment and then he laughed.

"And I had to outfigure you. I had to go out and pick up a fortune before you would take any stock in me. You are my class. I want you with me."

He looked around the circle of faces good-naturedly.

"Can I bank on a favor from you, a great big personal favor?"

"Yea! You bet! Name it!" rang the shouts.

Keene took up the bag of money.

"Then take this money. Appoint a committee and spend it for the good of the camp. That's the favor I'm asking and it is a favor. I have other work in mind and don't want to be hampered by this cash. And if I have anything to say in the future that sounds out of the ordinary don't force me to go out and pick up a million to prove that I'm not bughouse."

The crowd roared.

Keene went back to live at his cottage. The inside of the club was overhauled and new furnishings bought. An addition was built for a reading-room and books began to arrive by boxfuls and find places on the rows of shelves. The tables became littered with periodicals and magazines. A thousand touches were added to the camp, and the place took on an appearance of wild beauty.

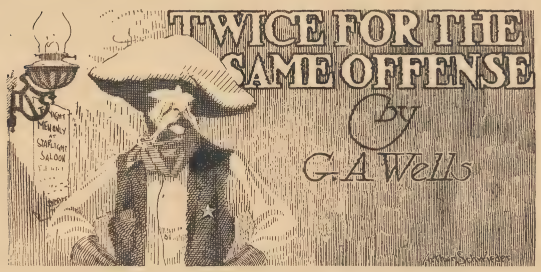
Even the Quechua laborers and camp followers found themselves in possession of clean barracks and shanties. Up to this time they had lived in squalor in mud kennels on the outskirts of the camp. Dr. O'Hennessy jokingly said he knew of several who had died from the effects of taking baths.

White men who had considered the camp no place for their families now sent for them and they began to arrive on every train. The refining effects of women and children began to be felt. The club donned drawing-room manners each Wednesday, which was ladies' day.

And in this community Robert Keene was an institution. His mind was continually probing for facts. He labored unceasingly at experiments and he took many trips into the hills. Far, far out on the lonely trail of unmapped thought he wandered. When he spoke men strained their minds to follow each word.

The name of this strange wise man began to travel out from the camp. People made long trips to see him. Colleges sent professors to interview him on some discussed topic. His name appeared often in magazines of philosophy, psychology, science and biology. He knew the inmost secrets of men and women who came to seek advice.

The path up to his cottage became a broad well-beaten road.


TWICE FOR THE SAME OFFENSE
By
G. A. Wells
NIGHT MEN ONLY AT STARLIGHT SALOON

Author of "Below the Mark," "The Weak Spot," etc.

SHERIFF BILLY RANSOM stood alone on the orchestra platform at one end of the long dance hall of the Starlight saloon. He was a small man with very long mustaches that made him look top-heavy. A stranger could not have told whether his steel-gray eyes sparkled kindly or glittered dangerously. The skin on his face and hands, warped and gnarled like the bark of an oak tree, reminded one of very ancient parchment. Fifty-five eventful years had passed over his head, leaving his scant hair the color of dirty snow.

Sheriff Billy, blinking in the strong light from a dozen or more oil lamps that stood in wall-brackets, let his gaze wander speculatively over the crowd that lounged on chairs and benches, and leaned indolently against the side walls. It was a crowd of male gender exclusively. The hand-printed placard that Sheriff Billy had posted on the door of the post-office that morning had specifically stated "Men Only."

Eagle, as much like any one of the myriad cow-towns that are to be found scattered about the broad expanse of the state of Texas as one pea is like another, boasted a permanent population of sixty males and eight females. Transients kept the number of males constantly at about eighty. Sheriff Billy knew all of them personally and most of them were his friends.

There was an even dozen men, however, who were not his friends; nor was he their friend. The reason lay in the fact that the dozen men represented the exact opposite of what Sheriff Billy did, and Sheriff Billy represented law and order.

While Sheriff Billy's eyes were wandering over the crowd before him he was singling out the faces of the dozen men of law-breaking propensity and mentally checking them to see that they were all present. Much to his gratification not a single face of the dozen he sought was missing. That was as it should be and as he had suspected it would be, for it was to the advantage of the dozen men to keep themselves well informed about the doings and sayings of Sheriff Billy Ransom.

A broad leather, cartridge-stuffed belt circled the sheriff's waist. On either side of the belt at the hip swung a holster containing a competent six-gun. Sheriff Billy casually hitched the holsters around front where the guns would be handy, his gaze at the time fastened upon the sneering face of one "Frio" Bill, king-pin of the renegade twelve.

"Gents," began the sheriff after clearing his throat, "I've asked you-all to gather yere tonight so as I could say a few words to you-all about a matter of burnin' importance to this yere town an' county we calls Eagle. I ain't no speaker, gents, which you know, so what I says I says in plain words anybody can understand.

"It's this I wants to say to you-all, gents: There's been entirely too much lawlessness in this neck of the woods lately to suit me, an' judgin' by certain remarks I've heard some of you let fall now an' then I reckon I ain't the only one feels that way about it."

He stopped and pinned Frio Bill with his eyes. The sneer on Frio Bill's face deepened perceptibly.

"Durin' the past couple months or so," Sheriff Billy went on, "there's been a mighty sight of random shootin' an' holdin' up stages an' rustlin' cattle an' depredations like them. It's got so a man's life an' property ain't safe none a-tall 'round yere no more."

"Yore a-tellin' it, Billy!" some one in the rear encouraged him.

"When you-all elects me sheriff of this yere county four year ago," the sheriff continued, "I gives you my word on the Book I'd be faithful in the performances of my duties, which the same is keepin' law an' order in Eagle county to the best of my ability. I've knowed a good many of you gents for years, an' when I pins this yere badge on my vest I allows my labors is a-goin' to be easy an' few, which the most of you is disposed to observe peace an' rectitude. But, gents, I now finds there's a few of you takin' advantage of me an' is pullin' up yore stake-pins an' draggin' yore ropes all over the range of disorder."

He paused long enough to rest accusative eyes upon Frio Bill and his henchmen.

"I ain't mentionin' no names," he proceeded. "I leaves it to them that's guilty to know who I mean. Now then, gents, I'm kinda het up about this, an' I wants to warn you-all this game of bad-man, cattle rustlin', stage robbin' an' shootin' up the town an' her citizens has got to stop. An' I don't mean it's got to stop next week or next month or next year, neither. I mean it's got to stop right now.

"As I tells you previous, gents, I ain't no speechin' man. I'm just a plain old man which I'm also sheriff of this yere county sworn to do his duty keepin' law an' order. An', gents, I'm a-tellin' you-all that yereafter there's goin' to be law an' order in this town an' plumb out to the limits of my jurisdiction or I'm goin' to make a heap of trouble for somebody. When I leaves this house of sin an' joy I goes straight to my bailiwick an' slicks up these yere guns an' gits 'em ready for immediate use.

"Moreover, gents, I wishes to state that yereafter there's goin' to be only two kinds of penalty in this town. Them that commits minor offenses like gittin' drunk too often, shootin' out winders an' breakin' the Starlight lookin'-glasses, cheatin' at gamblin', an' little things like them, gits run out of town instanter. Hoss thieves, cattle rustlers stage robbers an' man killers gits their necks stretched on sight. I decides all cases personal an' my word is final.

"Gents, I asks you-all to take it to yore heart what I says yere tonight an' ponder it in yore heads a bit before you elects to satiate 'round yere promiscuous. It's a kind of vigilance law I'm puttin' in yere, which I figger the situation's plumb desperate thataway. I ain't makin' nary exception to the rules I states; which they includes all of you, an' specially them gents what answers to any of the entitlements aforesaid.

"Tom Danton, you an' Jack an' Pete an' Frank an' Sam come along with me to my bailiwick an' we takes preliminary steps to swear you-all in deputies an' organize for war.

"That's all, gents, an' I bids you-all a hearty good night."

THE second evening following, at the Starlight saloon, Tom Danton, an impetuous young man of forty-nine years, shot and instantly killed one Joe Arguelles, a party of Mexican father and Hopi Indian mother.

Jack Thompson, one of the deputies whom Sheriff Billy had sworn in to assist him in cleansing Eagle County of its human dirt, was an eye-witness to the killing. He hurried at once to the bailiwick of Sheriff Billy down the street to lay the matter before his chief before making an arrest.

Now it so happened that Tom Danton and Sheriff Ransom were bosom friends. Their friendship had passed through almost every conceivable sort of test and had endured. Between very few blood brothers existed the genuine affection that existed between Sheriff Billy and Tom Danton.

"Billy, Tom just irrigates Joe Arguelles," was the way Thompson broke the news to the sheriff.

At the moment Sheriff Billy was sucking at a long stogie, his nimble fingers busily weaving a hatband of horsetail hair. He spent most of his odd time plaiting buckskin into stake ropes and lariats for sale, and making fancy gew-gaws of hair and beads for his friends. It was an art in which he excelled.

At Thompson's announcement Sheriff Billy's fingers came to a full stop and he quickly looked up at his informer with a rather pained expression in his eyes.

"How's that, Jack?" he asked.

"Tom just shot Arguelles," repeated the other. "Split Joe's heart with a bullet, an' Joe never knowed what hit him."

The look of pain on the sheriff's face intensified and he laid aside his work.

"Tell me about it, Jack," he requested.

"Tom an' three others was playin' poker at the Starlight," said Thompson. "The others was Ed Love, Charlie Harris an' Pedro Zayas. Zayas is one of Frio Bill's crowd, you know. He was settin' right acrost from Tom an' Arguelles was standin' behind Tom's chair.

"Pedro was winnin' steady, an' him bein' a pore hand at poker thataway it looked kind of funny. Then Jim Hart whispers somethin' in Tom's ear an' Tom jumps up an' lights into Arguelles with his tongue. He claims Joe's been signalin' to Pedro what kind of cards Tom holds."

"Was that right, Jack?" the sheriff asked.

"Jim Hart swears he seen him, an' Arguelles don't deny it none."

"What did Joe do then, Jack?"

"Why, he come back at Tom in Spanish, an' some of the boys what knows the lingo says he makes remarks no real man's goin' to put up with none. Tom knowed the lingo an' I see his face go white, then all of a sudden he draws an' puts a bullet through Arguelles' heart."

"Did—did Arguelles draw first, Jack?" the sheriff inquired.

"You mean was it self-defense, Billy? No, can't say it was," replied Thompson with evident reluctance. "It was just that —— hot temper of Tom's, which it gits away with him an' I reckon he shoots before he knowed what he was doin'. That's all. Billy, Arguelles is layin' on the floor at the Starlight dead as Moses."

"Where'd Tom go?"

"He hadn't gone nowheres when I left; he didn't look to me like he was goin' anywheres. Better come along an' see about it yoreself, Billy. I don't like to say nothin' to Tom, him bein' a particular friend of yore 'n."

"All right, I'll come, Jack," said Sheriff Billy.

As he rose to his feet it would seem that he had aged considerably in the past five or ten minutes. His face was drawn and troubled. In silence he buckled his belt with his guns about him and took down the key of the jail hanging on a nail. Then he and Thompson went out and up the street to the Starlight saloon.

They found Tom Danton still there sitting on the edge of a card table, smoking a cigaret. On the floor where it had fallen, now covered with a blanket, lay the body of Joe Arguelles. There were perhaps twenty men in the saloon besides Danton, including Pedro Zayas. Zayas was the only member of the Frio Bill gang present.

As sheriff Billy, closely followed by Jack Thompson, entered the saloon and walked to where the body lay and lifted a corner of the blanket and looked at the dead man's face, not a word was spoken. It was one of those tense moments when speech seems to be strictly out of order.

There was not a single man in the saloon at that moment who had not been present in the Starlight dance hall two evenings before when Sheriff Billy had announced his policy of law and order for the future. And, by some trick of fate, some despicable irony, Tom Danton, one of the deputies who had been sworn in to help toward making Eagle County safe and sane, had been the first to transgress. Moreover, and this was the devilish irony of it, Tom Danton was Sheriff Billy Ransom's best friend.

Finally the sheriff dropped the blanket and turned slowly to look at the man who had killed Arguelles. Danton dropped his cigaret on the floor and rose and put a foot on it. Then his eyes encountered those of the sheriff. They looked full at each other a moment or two, then Sheriff Billy looked away.

"Did anybody yere see this Arguelles go after a gun?" the sheriff asked generally of the crowd.

His tone was appealing, imploring, as if in his heart was a prayer that at least one man in the crowd would answer in the affirmative. But none of them answered anything at all. They understood what the sheriff was driving at and some of them cursed under their breath that they were unable to help him.

"Or a knife or any weapon a-tall?" supplemented Sheriff Billy.

"Joe Arguelles, he ees my frien', an' I know w'at he got, an' he has no knife or gun an' no nothin' to keel. Danton, he keel my frien' like a dog, señor sheriff."

This from Pedro Zayas. An angry murmur from the crowd arose and the sheriff looked hard at the Mexican. Then once more Sheriff Billy lifted the blanket, this time pulling it clear of the body. He stooped and searched the body thoroughly and at length got to his feet again with empty hands. Pedro Zayas had spoken the truth.

"Can't find no weapon, gents," the sheriff said. "If we could find a weapon mebbe——"

"Yore barkin' up the wrong tree, Billy," spoke Tom Danton. "I'm not claimin' self-defense. The greaser calls me a —— —— —— ——, an' I killed him."

"Sorry, Tom," said the sheriff, a trace of huskiness in his voice. "Lemme have yore gun."

NOT long after, Danton stood by himself on the dirt floor of Eagle's adobe jail looking at the moon through iron bars. The door of his prison was locked on the outside and the sheriff had the key. And not far away in the sheriff's bailiwick sat Sheriff Billy and Jack Thompson.

Sheriff Billy, his forehead wrinkled like a sheet of corrugated iron, chewed at a stogie and stared at the floor. Thompson, a cigaret between his lips, sat on the end of his spine in a chair thoughtfully gazing at the ceiling. Thus they had been sitting in a complete silence for the past ten or fifteen minutes.

"If we'd only found a knife or somethin', Jack, mebbe we could fix it so Tom could claim self-defense," Sheriff Billy's mournful voice finally broke the silence. "But then ag'in Tom hisself admits he killed Arguelles in hot temper an' didn't see Joe try to draw no weapon. Plenty heard him. I reckon Tom's guilty, all right."

There was that in the sheriff's voice that caused Thompson to send him a quick glance. Sheriff Billy's face was hard and grim looking.

"Billy Ransom, are you calculatin' to——"

Thompson did not finish. What he had started to say was even too preposterous to think about. Sheriff Billy made a little noise in his throat and did not look at his deputy.

"I passed my word, Jack," he said. "I told 'em what they could expect if there was any more promiscuous shootin' in this yere town. They all heard me. An' Tom he's done gone an' busted that rule plumb to ——. I wisht to Gawd we'd of found a knife, Jack."

"You danged old buzzard, are you aimin' to tell me yore a-goin' to stretch Tom's neck for killin' that no-'count Arguelles?" demanded Thompson.

"I passed my word an' Tom busted the rule," answered Sheriff Billy.

"Yore an old fool!" cried the deputy. "Why, you lemme tell you, Billy Ransom; you can't hang Tom for killin' Arguelles. Tom's got friends here, he has. Didn't you tell me yoreself just the other day you had an idea Arguelles was one of them stuck up the stage down to Los Gatos two weeks ago? If anybody 'round here needed killin' it was that Arguelles person. An' now you wantin' to stretch Tom Danton's neck for riddin' Eagle of him. Billy Ransom, you quit yore foolin'."

"I ain't foolin', Jack," said Sheriff Billy, shaking his head. "I passed my word an' I got——"

"—— yore word!" snapped Thompson.

"I passed my word an' I got to keep it. If I was to let this go 'thout doin' nothin' about it them varmints I'm after would git the idea I was talkin' through my hat the other night an' bust loose worse'n ever. I got to, Jack; there ain't no way out of it. I tell you I got to hang old Tom up by the neck same as I would one of them Frio Bill renegades, which them's the folks I'm after. Cold blooded killin', Jack, it was.

Tom hisself says so. I got to hang Tom, I tell you."

Jack Thompson began to swear. He cursed Sheriff Billy up one side and down the other. He cursed the sheriff long and fervently. And he stopped only when both his breath and vocabulary were exhausted.

"I reckon mebbe I'm ever'thing you said, Jack," said Sheriff Billy humbly when his deputy subsided. "But I passed my word."

Thompson opened his lips as if to begin the tirade anew, but with a single sizzling oath he closed them again and whipped out a sack of tobacco and a book of papers and began to twist a cigaret.

"Now don't you go gettin' all het up about this yere business, Jack Thompson," the sheriff said quietly. "I reckon there's others thinks as much of old Tom Danton as you do. Me an' Tom was mighty nigh born an' raised together. First time I ever laid eyes on him was one time down on the border.

"Both of us was yearlin's then, in a way of speakin', him bein' only nineteen an' me twenty-five. Them was troublesome days, Jack, they shorely was, what with the Apaches an' the renegade Mexicans runnin' wild an' lootin' an' killin' frequent enough to suit anybody."

The old man paused and pulled at his long mustaches and looked at the toe of his left boot reminiscently.

"I ain't much of a hand to talk about things which happens 'way back yonder so far you almost forgit they happens," he went on presently. "There's too much present to keep a man busy 'thout diggin' 'round thataway in the past. But this yere affair Tom ventilatin' Arguelles kind of brings to mind one or two little incidents happens quite a spell ago. Am I borin' you, Jack?"

"Go on," answered Thompson gruffly.

"Way I come to meet Tom Danton, Jack, I hook up with the Rangers an' git myself sent out to join Cap'n Saterlee's troop patrollin' the Presidio County border. A gang of Mexicans which they got a leader name of Tino Beceda was causin' the Rangers out that way a heap of trouble 'long about that time, what with raidin' American ranches an' stampedin' cattle acrost the river. There was a few killin's too in cases where ranchmen objected to havin' their cows rustled thataway, but them was mostly reduced to a minimum by the cattlemen theirselves, so to speak.

"Well, Tom Danton was one of Saterlee's troop, him joinin' up not long before I came along, an' somehow me an' him cottoned to each other right from the start off. It wasn't no time a-tall till the rest of the boys got to callin' us the Twins, which we was that inseparable. Many's the time me an' Tom's slept under the same blanket. Cap'n Saterlee knowed how it was with me an' Tom, an' when he sent one of us anywheres he always sent the other 'n' too. Which he said he was afraid we'd pine away an' die if we was separated thataway.

"One time when the troop's restin' at Marfa word comes to the cap'n by way of a greaser kid that Tino Beceda was aimin' to visit his girl, a Mexican lady that lives with her sheep-herder daddy in a little hut down on Hot Springs crick, near the foothills of the Chinati Range. That shorely was good news. This yere Tino was a bad egg an' we had orders from headquarters to git him first time he put his foot on our side of the river. Mebbe headquarters figgers if we ketched Tino it would go a long ways to'ards bustin' up his gang, which I reckon it would.

"As far as we knowed Tino hadn't been north of the river goin' on mebbe it's three months. The last time he was over on our side he raided a ranch an' killed two ranchmen where Fort Davis is now. He was plenty fit for hangin', so it was good news him callin' on his lady friend thataway, which mebbe we would git him that time. The kid what brought the news said he would be alone. Cap'n asks the boy what makes him bust out on the secret thataway about Tino, an' the kid says one time Tino kills his big brother an' he wants to git square with Tino.

"Well, Cap'n sends for me an' Tom an' tells us we're detailed to go down there to that sheep-herder's hut where Tino's expected to call an' fetch him in. Which it was a fifty-mile ride down there from Marfa.

" 'Now you two boys be mighty careful,' the Cap'n says to me an' Tom when we was gittin' in our saddles. 'Tino's a tricky gent an' mebbe that boy tells the truth an' mebbe he don't. For all we know it might be a trap. But if we wants to ketch Tino we got to take risks. I can't send nobody else with you account of the troop goin' on special detail to Alpine tomorrow. I'm sendin' you boys 'cause you-all ain't so well knowed as us old heads, which that's an advantage. You bring Mister Tino back yere alive if you can, but bring him back. So long, an' good luck.'

"Me an' Tom starts early enough in the mornin' to come up to the Chinati foot-hills late that afternoon an' we didn't have no trouble findin' Hot Springs crick. We struck the crick near headwater, which then all we has to do to locate that hut was follow the crick down, the hut bein' in sight of the crick, accordin' to the greaser kid, with plenty chaparral an' pear standin' ever'-where. I'm tellin' you it was a wild country.

"The sun was purty near down when finally me an' Tom sights the hut, so we stops an' consults an' concludes a plan of action. Accordin' to the story the boy told Cap'n this yere Tino ain't due at the hut till mornin' of the next day. Me an' Tom figgers the best plan would be to go on to the hut an' take the girl an' her daddy an' hold 'em prisoner till Tino shows up, then we bags him. So we hobbles our hosses short an' leaves 'em in a thick patch of chaparral about a mile up the crick from the hut an' goes on afoot.

"When we come up to the hut there ain't nobody in sight. Tom knocks on the door, but nobody comes to open it an' we open it ourselves an' go inside. If we'd of had any sense a-tall we would of knowed right there that seein' nobody an' hearin' nothin' thataway it was a good sign for us to lay low. But we didn't know as much then as we do now, an' anyhow we was both kind of flighty.

"By that time the sun was plumb gone, an' what with the chaparral thick thataway all around the hut it was kind of dark inside an' we couldn't see nothin'. The first we knowed there was anybody in the hut was when they comes at us whoopin' Spanish cuss words an' poppin' at us with their guns. I heard Tom's gun go off twicet 'longside of me, but before I could git my own gun in action somethin' powerful hard hits me on the back of the head an' I tumbles.

"When I come to ag'in I'm all tied up hand an' foot an' layin' on my back about a dozen feet from where four greasers was settin' 'round a fire smokin' cigarets an' jabberin' Spanish. I judged one of them, a purty good sized gent with fancy clothes, to be Tino Beceda hisself, which my judgment was correct when I hears one of the others call him by name.

"I could jabber their lingo about as good as they could an' that way I knowed what they was talkin' about. First thing I done when I come to was look 'round for Tom, figgerin' mebbe he was a prisoner like me. Or mebbe he's dead an' I sees his body somewheres. But he wasn't present none, which by an' by I gathers by what the greasers say he'd got clean away. One of his bullets had downed one of their men, though, then he slid out the door into the chaparral an' lost hisself complete. Two of 'em went after him, but they didn't find him; an' I reckoned they hadn't located our hosses either, 'cause they wasn't mentioned.

"I tell you I was mighty glad to know that Tom'd got away, though I couldn't figger it would help me none. Before he could ride to Alpine where the rest of the troop was by that time mebbe an' tell Cap'n what had happened an' bring 'em on, my goose would be cooked one way or the other. There wasn't no doubt in my mind them greasers would make me pay for the man Tom killed, which me bein' a Ranger thataway made it certain they'd spill my beans. There wasn't no guessin' about my fate. No, siree.

"Well, when Tino seen I had my eyes open he got up an' come over an' kicked me in the ribs an' cussed me somethin' awful till he runs out of breath, then he kicked me ag'in an' went back to the fire an' curls down on a blanket an' dropped off to sleep. Purty soon two others was asleep, which that left only one of 'em awake to keep an eye on me. Of course when he wasn't lookin' my way I tried to git my hands loose, but I was tied too tight an' numerous for that.

"Finally I give up tryin' to git loose an' resigned myself to bad luck, which I starts to wonderin' how them Mexicans will do for me. Would they knife me, shoot me, hang me, burn me, or hitch me on the end of a rope behind a hoss an' drag me to death? I concluded they'd drag me to death, that bein' a favorite form of death this yere Tino party inflicts on his victims. By makin' my death slow thataway he'd have that much more fun killin' me.

"There wasn't nothin' joyful layin' there all trussed up thataway picturin' myself bouncin' an' bumpin' along in the rear of a hoss goin' as fast as he could throw a leg, my nose diggin' in the sand an' my body hittin' agin rocks an' gettin' all cut up on cactus. No, siree, it wasn't pleasant by a long shot. I had one consolation, though; Tom'd got away.

"It must of been near midnight when all of a sudden I heard a little noise like mebbe it's gravel rollin' or a twig breakin' about thirty feet behind the greaser that was guardin' me. He heard the noise too, I reckon, 'cause he turned his head quick as lightin' an' put his hand on his gun. He looked back that way a long time, an' then since he didn't see nothin' or hear the noise ag'in he turned 'round an' went to rollin' a fresh cigaret.

"But I saw what he didn't an' couldn't see. Him settin' up thataway he couldn't see things on the ground as well as I could. You know how that is, Jack. What I saw an' he didn't was somethin' that looked a heap like a man layin' out there belly down in the sand as still as a shadow. You bet my heart went jumpin' in my mouth. If it was a man, an' I was purty shore it was a man, it couldn't be nobody else but Tom Danton, which I thought by that time was mebbe half way back to Marfa. It made me feel lots better to know mebbe I was goin' to have a show for my life after all.

"I reckon the greaser who's appointed to watch me has a hard day of it, 'cause by an' by he got to noddin' an' his cigaret dropped out of his mouth. Old Tom seen it too an' he started wormin' his way forward a little bit at a time. I didn't hardly breathe for fear he'd git ketched before he got in strikin' reach of that Mexican man. But he didn't hear Tom none; I didn't hear him myself, which all I could do was see him move to know he was movin'. I never in my life see a man crawl along on his belly thataway quiet as Tom did then. I bet no Apache beat it. Purty soon he was only three or four feet from the greaser.

"Then mebbe it's somethin' tells that greaser man all ain't well behind him an' he wakes up sudden. But before he could bat an eye Tom slammed him on the head with his gun an' tumbles him over. As he went over, though, he let out a squawk that brought the other three to their feet pronto. Tom yells so you could of heard it a mile, then he lets go with his six-gun an' brings a man down. Two more shots gits another man. Which it's Tino hisself is left, an' by that time he has his rifle an' bangs loose at Tom. It was a clean miss, him not bein' awake yet mebbe, which you can't do much with a rifle at close range nohow.

"Well, Tino saw he couldn't pump another ca'tridge into his rifle before Tom got to him, so he ends her an' uses it for a club. He swung at Tom's head like he was aimin' to knock it into the next county. Tom tells me later he figgers to ketch Tino alive, which is why he don't shoot no more. He drops his gun an' ducks under Tino's rifle an' they close. The rifle goes flyin'.

"Tino was a plumb bigger man than Tom by mebbe it's fifty pounds, but Tom was a mighty good hand at wrastlin' an' that kind of evened things a bit. They lit into each other like a couple of bobtailed cats with a grudge, an' finally went down huggin', Tom on top.

"Me bein' tied thataway I couldn't do nothin' to help Tom, which all I could do was cuss that Tino party an' holler to Tom to look out for the knife Tino had drawed from somewheres an' was tryin' to stick in Tom's ribs. I could see ever'thing plain enough by the light of the fire.

"Well, they fought like a couple of devils mebbe it's five minutes, then I hears Tino give a grunt like somethin' was hurtin' him right smart an' he lets go his hold on Tom an' lays still. When Tom gits up I see he had turned the greaser's own knife agin him, which of course that's the end of Mister Tino Beceda.

"Well, Tom cuts me loose an' we brings 'round the Mexican Tom knocked out an' tied him up, then we look for the greasers' hosses. Which we found five of 'em in the chaparral not far away an' fetches 'em into camp. We lashes the four dead Mexicans on their hosses, which we found the body of the fourth man in the hut, an' boosts the live man up to his saddle an' ties his feet to the stirrups. Then we goes up the crick leadin' the five hosses till we finds our own, which they ain't been disturbed none, an' starts back for Marfa right then. We gits back there about noon next day.

"All in all it's a purty good job me an' Tom done that time, though Tom done it all hisself, an' I'm shore grateful to him for pullin' me out of that hole. I recollect another time Tom done me a good turn similar, but I reckon you-all don't care to hear about it, Jack. Ever since that time me an' Tom's been as clost together as the prongs on a clothes-pin. I reckon Tom Danton's the best friend I got."

Sheriff Billy stopped speaking and Thompson grunted an oath.

"What's all that got to do with you stretchin' Tom's neck for killin' that Arguelles breed?" the deputy growled.

"Dunno, Jack. Mebbe because a time like this a man thinks about things."

Another oath from Thompson.

"Seems to me, Billy Ransom," he said, "if it was my life Tom saved that time I'd find enough gratitude in my system to make me go out there an' unlock that jail door an' tell Tom Danton he's a free man."

"Now, now, Jack," protested Sheriff Billy. "I'm sheriff of this county an' I've got my duty to do as I sees it. Tom killed an unarmed man an' he's got to pay the penalty as specified by me the other night. You run along, Jack, an' don't bother me."

Sheriff Billy rose and from a peg on the wall took down a coil of brand new two-inch hemp rope. Thompson's eyes nearly popped from his head.

"—— me if I don't believe yore a-goin' to do it, you old fool!" he snarled.

"Course I'm goin' to do it, Jack," answered the sheriff. "I passed my word an' I got to make an example of somebody to show the rest of you I mean business. If Tom's the man I puts up as the example that's bad luck. If I was to let Tom off 'thout hangin' him, Frio Bill an' his crowd would play their hands high an' often. You go 'long now like I tell you."

Thompson went. He went swearing and banged the door behind him.

AT PRECISELY fifteen minutes of noon the following day Sheriff Billy, with a coil of brand new two-inch hemp rope circling his left arm and his six-guns at his hips, went to the jail and unlocked the door and threw it open. At various points farther up the street eighty pairs of eyes were watching him.

"Come along, Tom," the sheriff called into the jail.

Danton came out and Sheriff Billy gestured with his free hand up the street. Danton strode away with firm steps, the sheriff closing in behind him, his right hand resting on the butt of a gun. As they passed along, other men fell in behind them. At the Starlight saloon about twenty men joined the ranks, some mounted and others afoot. It was at the saloon that Frio Bill and his eleven cronies, all with their horses, joined the procession.

When the crowd reached the big cottonwood tree that stood at the end of the street, Sheriff Billy halted his prisoner directly under a big limb and ordered the crowd to stand back. The crowd formed a wide circle about the sheriff and his prisoner.

Early that morning Sheriff Billy had posted a notice on the post-office door to the effect that at high noon that day he would hang Tom Danton by the neck for murdering Joe Arguelles. Everybody who could had come to see the sheriff of Eagle County send a man to eternity via the hemp-rope route.

Quietly, yet with one eye always on the crowd, Sheriff Billy arranged one end of the rope he carried in a running noose and slipped the noose over his prisoner's head. Danton offered no objection. Between the rough rope and the flesh of Danton's neck the sheriff placed a small folded saddle-blanket, explaining that he had no desire to disfigure the persons of those who died by his hand. Danton thanked him for his thoughtfulness.

The noose, at length satisfactorily arranged about the condemned man's neck, Sheriff Billy tossed the free end over the big limb and brought the rope to the ground again.

"Where's my deputies?" he asked, looking around the circle.

"Yore aimin' to hang one of 'em, you stubborn old fool!" snarled Jack Thompson.

"I ain't hangin' 'em all, though mebbe it would do 'em good if I did," retorted Sheriff Billy sarcastically. "I want's my deputies to step out yere an' git this job over with. Come on."

But not a man stirred. A low murmur, like the muttering of a distant storm, arose from many throats. Sam Boyle, another of the deputies, spoke.

"Billy, yore the sheriff, all right, an' you done said what you was a-goin' to do if there was any more cold-blooded killin's in this town," he said. "But you ain't a-goin' to hang Tom there."

"Not by a —— of a sight he don't hang Tom for killin' that Arguelles reptile!" shouted Frank Childs, another deputy. "All right, boys!"

It would seem that there was a previously arranged plan to take the sheriff's prisoner from him by force should that action be required in order to save Danton. Childs and several others started forward. Like a flash Sheriff Billy jerked out both his guns and swung them up. His gray eyes glittered.

"I'll mess up the first man takes another step!" he said in a quiet tone; but its quietness made it that more ominous. "You boys back up!"

Those who had surged forward at Childs' bidding stopped short and glowered at the sheriff. None of them doubted that he would shoot if they went another step. It was the prisoner himself, his face serious, who came to Sheriff Billy's assistance at that critical moment.

"Much oblige', boys, for yore good intentions," Danton said, "but I'm askin' as a personal favor you let this hangin' go on. Billy don't like to do it no more 'n you-all like for him to do it. But you-all ain't sworn on the Book an' Billy is, therefore you-all ain't got no call to interfere with a gent when he's tryin' to do his lawful duty.

"I killed Arguelles in cold blood, as they calls it. He called me that name, which that shore makes me mad, an' I shot him, which that makes me liable to hangin'. Now you gents stand back. All right, Billy; go on with yore party. I got a-honin' to see what Heaven looks like."

Sheriff Billy gave his prisoner a glance that was a mixture of gratefulness and surprize. Then his eyes went roving about the circle again until they fell upon Frio Bill. Frio Bill and all his companions were standing together on one side of the circle holding their horses.

"Ain't nobody yere got enough sand to help me string up this yere prisoner?" asked the sheriff.

The invitation to participate in the hanging could not have been more direct had Sheriff Billy mentioned Frio Bill's name. And Frio Bill was secretly delighted to receive such an invitation. He hated Tom Danton for two reasons. First, because Danton was a friend of the sheriff's, and hating the sheriff as he did Frio Bill naturally hated any friend of the sheriff's.

Second, Joe Arguelles, the deceased, was a very particular friend of Frio Bill's. He was an important member of Frio Bill's gang. That fact, however, was not generally known, though it was suspected. Arguelles had been used in the capacity of scout for the gang, and his visible connection with Frio Bill would have made him *persona non grata* in certain quarters.

It would therefore be a decided pleasure to Frio Bill to help hang one of Sheriff Billy's friends, and at the same time the man who had killed an important member of the bandit gang. Frio Bill would be killing two birds with one stone. His only regret was that the sheriff's neck was not in the noose with Tom Danton's.

"Tail on here, men!" he ordered. "There's some around here ain't afraid to help the sheriff do his duty."

Frio Bill set the example and eleven other pairs of hands seized the free end of the rope. Sheriff Billy indulged himself in a quiet chuckle.

"Tom Danton, have you-all anything to say before you meets yore Gawd?" he said to the prisoner.

"Nary a whisper, Billy," answered Danton with a grin. "Play yore hand."

"Lift him up, men!" cried the sheriff. "Pronto!"

Twelve pairs of boots clawed at the ground and the rope tautened with a jerk. The next instant a dozen very much astonished men went floundering on their faces. The rope had parted about half way between Danton's neck and the limb above, and save for a moment of pain in the neck, which the folded blanket mitigated, Tom Danton was uninjured.

Perhaps a more astonished crowd never got together. There were one or two loud laughs at the discomfiture of Frio Bill and his men.

"Reckon you'll have to git another rope, Billy," said Danton, rubbing his neck. "I'm kind of hefty, you know. Le's have another rope, somebody."

Frio Bill came stumbling up, cursing softly to himself and digging sand from his ear. As he passed his horse he caught up the coil of rope swinging at his saddle-horn and proffered it to the sheriff. Sheriff Billy ignored the proffered rope completely.

"Gents, I shorely hates to disappoint you-all," he said to the crowd. "There ain't goin' to be no hangin' today, 'less you fetches me another prisoner suitable for hangin'. Providence has done took a hand in this game an' Tom is saved by the skin of his neck."

Sheriff Billy was looking squarely at Frio Bill as he spoke. Frio Bill cursed roundly.

"Sheriff, ain't you goin' to hang Danton?" he burst out.

"Shorely not," answered the sheriff. "If you knowed the law like I do you'd know you can't put a man's life in jeopardy twicet for the same offense. Providence done busted that rope an' that settles it. I ain't the man to buck Providence. No, siree."

"Danton hisself says he killed Joe cold-blooded!" snarled Frio Bill. "It's right he gits his neck stretched!"

"I reckon you've had yore say now, Bill," said Sheriff Billy calmly. "Next time somebody comes up for hangin' mebbe Providence won't be lookin' an' the rope won't bust thataway. I hopes you *sabe*, mister."

Frio Bill understood the sheriff's meaning perfectly and at once shut up and dropped back among his companions.

"Is that right, Billy? Don't I git hung today?" asked Danton.

"I cites you-all the law, Tom, an' I observes it to the last letter," replied the sheriff.

Danton let out a whoop and loosed the rope and blanket about his neck and threw them on the ground.

"Boys, who's my company down to the Starlight to drink on my good luck?" he shouted. "Come on, Billy."

Sheriff Billy gathered up the two pieces of the hemp rope and tucked them under his arm, then let Danton lock an arm in his and pull him toward the saloon.

Frio Bill knew well enough that he and his gang had not been included in Danton's invitation to drink, so, scowling darkly at the crowd as it moved away, he and his men remained behind.

"Maybee we get heem another time, *capitan*," said the soft voice of Pedro Zayas in Frio Bill's ear.

Frio Bill whirled on the Mexican.

"We're goin' to git the —— away from here, that's what we're goin' to git!" he said. "The man that'd try to hang his best friend wouldn't stand back if it come to stringin' up his worst enemy. I allow this ain't no healthy place for this gang no more, so we rides. Git aboard, men."

Sheriff Billy heard the thudding of horses' hoofs behind him and turned his head. He saw twelve horsemen riding swiftly westward. He was rather inclined to think that he was taking his last look at Frio Bill and his gang and he chuckled to himself. He turned to Danton, who walked by his side.

"Tom, wasn't you scared a little bit?" he asked.

"Scared!" answered Danton scornfully. "Say, you old reprobate, I reckon I've knowed you long enough to know when yore bluffin'. Scared nothin'! I knowed you'd find a way out without havin' to go back on yore word an' spoil yore bluff to Frio Bill an' his crowd. Besides, Billy, I reckon the rest of the boys overlooks the fact that even if you are sheriff you can't string a man up without he's been found guilty by a jury.

"An' there's another thing, you old renegade," Danton went on, "you shore was a-beatin' the devil 'round the stump when you-all says you can't risk my life twicet for the same offense. You don't know the law none a-tall, Billy. That racket don't come in 'less a man's been acquitted regular by a jury when he kills somebody. Don't you never set yoreself up for no law-sharp, Billy, with yore ignorance. I'm tellin' you."

"I knowed there was a law like that somewheres, Tom, but I didn't know how she worked," said Sheriff Billy. "I only figgers it to play my hand a winner, which it shorely did. About you irrigatin' Arguelles thataway, Tom, I'll write the gov'ner a letter an' tell him to send you a medal. It's all right, you killin' Arguelles. I tells the gov'ner he's one of Frio Bill's gang, which if he ain't he ought to be. Tom, remember that big *hombre* with Saterlee's troop when we was? That fella you pulled out of the Rio Grande that day when he had cramps?"

"Shore I remember him."

"He's gov'ner of Texas now, Tom. It's all right you ventilatin' Arguelles."

Late that night when Sheriff Billy had gone to his bailiwick alone after a prolonged debauch at the Starlight saloon with Tom Danton and other friends, he unfastened a coil of brand-new two-inch hemp rope consisting of two pieces. He looked at the ends where it had parted that afternoon.

The core of the rope had been severed with a knife and the outside strands had been neatly woven together again with a skill that deceived the most critical eye. It was an excellent example of blind splicing. The rope, though brand-new, would scarcely have sustained a fifty-pound weight.

Sheriff Billy's face broke into a smile.

Arthur Schwieder

CELESTIAL CARGO*

by Gregory Mason

Author of "French Heels and Bobbed Hair."

ADMIRATION for bravery is universal. There are countries where honesty is held low, countries where the cultivation of loyalty is neglected, countries where unselfishness is despised as weakness. But black, white, red, brown and yellow men unite in the worship of courage.

We were talking in this vein, Skipper "Dredge" Amory and I, one lazy afternoon on the bridge of Amory's little tramp steamer, the *Sham-pan*, which lay at a wharf in Marseilles.

Dredge loved to philosophize, to go to the bottom of a subject and "muck around for all lumps of fact," as he put it, which was how he got his nickname.

"Speaking of courage, look at them Chinks coming aboard now," said Amory, waving a hand toward a stream of Chinese coolies which poured off the dock over a gangway and down into the odoriferous hold of the old steamer. "With most white men 'Chinamen's courage' is proverbial for no courage at all. Yet I've seen things in the East that'd make me think twice before I'd say that the Chinaman's yeller goes any deeper than his skin."

The skipper paused and narrowed his eyes as he always did when thinking.

"I believe courage is mostly a question of what a man thinks is worth fightin' for," he continued. "A flag ain't nothin' to a Chink. But just you try to take a foot of his land from him, or maybe, suggest disturbin' the bones of his ancestors."

A reflective sparkle in Amory's eye grew quickly to a blaze of amusement.

"I seed a feller oncet—" he was fairly crackling with internal laughter now—"I seed a feller oncet try to put a street car line through a Chinese cemetery. Roary, Boary Alice!"

In his gusty laughter the captain choked on his quid; his tanned face turned purple. The approach of the third officer with a question about stowing the cargo put an end to our conversation.

I did not dream how soon we were to have a demonstration of the quality of Chinese courage as I leaned over the bridge rail and watched the coolies coming aboard. They were some of the invalids weeded out of the labor corps which were used to make roads and dig reserve trenches in France. When a Chinaman in a foreign country becomes sick in body he becomes homesick in soul. A homesick Chinaman is no use to any one, including himself. Therefore, these were being sent home on the *Sham-pan*.

Home! That word has a meaning to a Chinaman which few of us nomadic Americans ever know. For instance, here was I with an army discharge in my pocket bound for Shanghai instead of for New York. But to a Chinaman his home is half his religion. The skipper's words returned to me:

"I believe courage is mostly a question of what a man thinks is worth fightin' for. A flag ain't nothin' to a chink."

"Celestial Cargo," copyright, 1922, by Gregory Mason.

"Certainly no nation has less patriotism than the Chinese," I reflected, "but no nation has more love of family. And is not the Chinese attitude an intelligent one?"

I looked aft to number two hatch where a crane was dropping chunky, oblong boxes into the hold. There was an example of Chinese values. Each of those boxes held a body doubled up in the Buddhist fashion—the body of a labor coolie who had met death in France and who had put it in his contract that if he died his body must be shipped home. For to be buried in a foreign land is to the Chinese mind a tragedy too painful to contemplate.

The old *Sham-pan* would ride high on this voyage. Except for the coolies, living and dead, she would carry little. A cargo of corpses! Yet it was a fitting cargo for this old hulk, a mere rotting corpse of a ship herself. How old she was, how many years she had sailed the four seas of China alone, no one seemed to know.

On the front of the deckhouse was an empty niche where had once been her builder's name-plate. Owned now by American and Chinese capital, she flew the Chinese flag. Her skipper was an American, her second officer a Portuguese, her third a Briton and her crew Chinese.

When the Oriental republic had entered the war the steamer had been in the China coastwise trade. Since then she had made one voyage to France laden with foodstuffs, and the effort had laid her up three months for repairs. Her plates were rusty, her tackle was frayed, and her salt-caked smokestack canted aft and to port. Considering her Chinese name as two English words, the *Sham-pan* was well named.

A dirty dock in Summer is not a savory place, and all of us were glad when the wheezy old ocean wanderer joined a convoy of freighters bound for Suez.

AT SEA again! To leave behind the foul smells of the city, the rattle of cabs, the shock of cobblestones for the soft green restfulness of the sea. When, at the harbor's mouth, the *Sham-pan* met the ingliding embrace of the ocean she gave herself to it gladly, utterly, as to the caresses of a lover long away.

Twenty-four hours out of port our engine began to weaken. The senior convoying destroyer's repeated inquiries as to whether we needed help were stopped at last with the message that little could be done for us, in the opinion of our chief engineer, who had diagnosed our engine trouble as "senile decay." Whereupon the destroyer set standard speed for the flotilla at a pace that made us seem to crawl, and morning found us alone.

Behind, for miles, our low-trailing smoke brushed the foamy wake undisturbed by a breath of air. The day was frightfully hot. The slight ground-swell which crept through the expanse of viscid blue jelly about us gave it no more life than the painted canvas ocean of "The Witching Waves" at Coney Island. The sun climbed higher; our decks sweated pitch.

On such still, hot days as this one, and those that followed, the best hour is just after sunset. As the sky darkens the air grows slightly cooler, and men who have dozed all day begin to walk about the ship a little. It grows yet darker and a big star shines out above the foremast. The officer of the deck lights a cigaret contentedly, for now he has "a tall ship and a star to steer her by."

An even fringe of white foam clings to the ship from end to end and hisses softly, steadily, sleepily. It is a cool sound, too, for it suggests the faint rustle of slush ice on a Spring morning when the tide begins to move. A straight furrow runs diagonally off each bow, deepened by the shadow from the faint moon. Except for that soft, steady sleepy hiss overside there is no sound, unless you go aft to the uneven roar of the wake.

Down beneath number two hatch, candles always glimmered and incense burned before the coffins. A boy of nineteen, called Teddy because of a fancied resemblance to a famous American statesman, and an elderly Chinese named Sing Wo, were the chief mourners. It seemed that one of the queer-shaped coffins contained the body of a brother of Sing Wo, and another held all that was left of the father of Teddy, and each time I went near this sepulchral part of the ship I found the devoted man and boy in attitudes of immovable grief.

It was good to leave this gloom for the noonday blaze of the bridge. From here an officer and a seaman swept the horizon with glasses. The same alert watch was kept by a sailor in each of the two crow's-nests. A lone steamer, armed with only a three-inch gun, and limping along at five knots an hour would make easy picking for a U-boat.

Through borrowed glasses I swept the horizon myself until my eyes began to wince at the monotony of blue sea broken only by blue sky. I was about to lower the glasses when miles away something thin and sharp jutted from the polished surface of the Mediterranean. Then the water boiled, and a great gray shape rose dripping from the sea and bulged against the horizon until the lenses were filled with the familiar profile of a large submarine.

Orders were shouted this way and that, and miraculously the old *Sham-pan* hummed with sudden life. Coolies ran to our side and stared stupidly at the distant steel monster, then jabbered excited gutturals to other coolies below. Eager hands tore the canvas jacket off the gun at our stern. Black smoke poured from the steamer's stack. She had been making her best speed under the conditions, yet almost imperceptibly she began to make better. She lurched about on short zigzags, creaking and groaning.

We pointed our gun, but the range was too great to fire. Almost immediately a column of water shot up off our bow, but two hundred yards short.

Another geyser leaped up three hundred yards the other side of us. He had the range of us. The enemy's gun carried farther than ours. He could keep out of our reach and pepper us until he got a hit home.

There was nothing to do but to heave to and surrender. Probably Dredge Amory was about to do this when a fluke shot struck fairly on our bridge, knocking the skipper senseless, killing the second officer and two seamen and carrying two spokes out of our wheel.

I was stunned myself, bruised and cut. By the time I recovered my wits Benson, the third officer, had reached the damaged bridge from his post at the gun and was shouting orders like a mad man. Our engine stopped obediently and the five-colored flag of China fluttered down the jackstaff.

At this a babel of voices rose from the stern. Our coolie passengers began gathering there in an excited mass. Their tones quickly changed from fear to unmistakable anger. Fists were raised at the scorching sky.

Two men who had no business on our bridge appeared there, Sing Wo and Teddy, the two Chinese I had seen mourning their dead in the hold. Behind them on the companionway were the faces of three or four of their fellows, serious faces with glistening eyes. The mien of Sing Wo and Teddy was serious, too, almost menacing as they approached the third officer.

"Master," said wrinkled Sing Wo, "we wanchee speak you."

"What's the matter?" asked Benson.

Of course he should have booted them off the bridge with celerity, but he was a man of slight morale at best; and he was not at his best now, under the sudden burden of responsibility.

"You no makee fight, master?" asked Sing Wo. "No makee more fight submaline? You dlop China flag, hey? You makee one sullenda?"

"—— you, yes, we're surrendering," yelled Benson, gradually regaining something like the proper air for an officer. "We're surrendering to keep you all from being blown to pieces like them two seamen was. —— —— you, yes, we're surrendering, and you two —— —— monkeys get to —— off this bridge!"

Sing Wo did not move. Benson raised his arm to strike. A Chinese quartermaster seized the upraised wrist.

"No mus' slike him, master," said the quartermaster apologetically as Benson turned on him with a snarl. "He velly good man, number one holy man."

Benson wrenched himself free and made to beat down the quartermaster when the old Chinese, whom till now I had supposed to be a common coolie, stepped between the two.

"Master, I speak you ploppa," said he. "Master, you listen me. Two hunda China boy here, they all follow Sing Wo."

Indeed there was an air about Sing Wo which implied he had long been accustomed to speak with authority.

"Master," he continued, "suppose we no fight. How fashion submaline do this ship? Submaline makee sink evellything?"

"No," snapped Benson; "you and your precious two hundred can have a chance to save your lives in the lifeboats. You no drown, old chink."

"But *Sham-pan* go sink?" persisted Sing Wo. "Evellything inside bottomside *Sham-pan* go sink? All dead China boy mus' go sink?"

"—— ——, yes," yelled Benson; "and if you and your —— pals don't climb off this bridge and obey my orders you can tell them all there'll be two hundred more China boys that'll go sink. Get, I say—*get!*"

Sing Wo "got," but without dropping a particle of his dignity.

We looked at the submarine again. She was signaling:

> Abandon ship immediately. Have your commander board us with ship's papers. Let all your other boats stand by half-way between your ship and us.

A canny boche, that. He was still far enough away to be a very difficult mark for us to hit even if we had had the whole concealed armament of a "mystery ship."

Benson gave an order for lowering and manning the lifeboats and went to get some papers from the captain's cabin, where Amory had been carried and lay still unconscious. I went to my cabin, which adjoined Benson's in the bridge-house, and began throwing things into a canvas carry-all.

PRESENTLY I heard Benson enter his own room and begin to rummage about there. Then from his direction came a choking sound like an outcry stifled at birth.

I turned toward my door and plumped into the arms of two sinewy Chinese seamen. In my weakened condition I could offer very little resistance, and in a few seconds was trussed against my berth, an undershirt stuffed into my mouth for gag. I heard Benson's door slam, then my door was closed also and locked from the outside.

Feet pattered about the deck beneath my porthole for a few seconds, then absolute silence fell over the *Sham-pan.*

What treachery was this? I judged the only other able white men on the ship, Benson, the chief and the second engineer, had met the same fate as I, or a worse fate. If only that submarine would hasten and board us! Austrians would be welcome now.

"If I must be a captive," I thought, "I would rather be an honorable prisoner of war than a victim of God-only-knows-what underhand plot."

The key clicked in my door. Sing Wo and Teddy entered. They bowed with polite gravity.

"Master," said the "number one holy man," now the evident leader of all his countrymen aboard the *Sham-pan*, "master, I think you good flen' all China people. We no wanchee hurt you, master. But you savvee we no wanchee submaline makee sink all dead China boy." A pleading note crept into Sing Wo's voice as he continued:

"Master, you been China side. You savvee ploppa 'ligion China people say all China people when die mus' be belly (*buried*) China side, ploppa China glave. If submaline makee sink *Sham-pan* thlee hunda China boy soul no havvee peace. You savvee?"

I "savveed." I had heard of the doctrine of Feng-Shui, or Incomprehensible Wind-Water, which dictates that every Chinese after death must be given a properly placed grave in his own country.

Well, to put Sing Wo's story into plain English, he declared that he and his countrymen had decided that the *Sham-pan* would never go to the bottom with that Celestial cargo except after a fight which made a corpse of every Buddhist aboard her.

I gathered that they felt that the salvation of their own souls was at stake, that they would be doomed to writhe in some Chinese hell under the eternal curses of their children and children's children unless they resisted to the last breath any violation of Chinese theories for the proper burial of those corpses in the *Sham-pan's* cargo.

Yes, Sing Wo was aware that our three-inch gun was practically useless against the heavier ordnance of the U-boat. He was aware that the submarine showed no intention of coming near enough to permit us to board her. But he had determined on a "tlick." To make this "tlick" effective my help was needed.

"We let you loose, you help us, master?"

After very little consideration I promised that I would loyally help this mutiny for the purpose of continuing the resistance against the sworn enemies of my country; this mutiny of Chinese against the order of her British commander that the ship be surrendered.

Sing Wo led me below decks and aft, always keeping me out of range of observation from the U-boat. In the semi-obscurity between decks Teddy and the Chinese quartermaster who had intervened between Benson and Sing Wo, brought from a locker a quantity of dynamite and explosive caps. These extraordinary Orientals explained that they wanted to make a bomb—

"Velly big number one bomb, master, plenty big makee sink submaline."

They did not know how to make it. Could I show them? I could and I did.

Apparently only Sing Wo, Teddy, the quartermaster and four seamen were in the conspiracy. The quartermaster directed two life-boats already loaded to row off toward the submarine, which had become suspicious of the delay and was signaling furious threats to resume firing. Then he proceeded lowering, filling and dispatching the other boats with the exception of the dingey, which he held ready at a rope ladder on the side of the steamer away from the U-boat.

Meanwhile I was showing Sing Wo and Teddy how to make a tremendous bomb by stuffing a quantity of dynamite into a galvanized-iron ash-can. After fitting on a detonating device we wrapped the can in a tarpaulin, leaving exposed only the firing-pin. Straps and a handle were then taken from a suitcase and fitted to the bomb, giving it the appearance of a crude duffel-bag, just such a piece of baggage as a seaman might carry.

Sing Wo and Teddy saluted each other gravely, almost tenderly. Followed by two seamen who carried the bomb, Sing Wo went above, hiding a hammer in his clothes as he went.

Teddy told me to stay where I was while he looked forward to make sure that Amory, Benson and the two engineers were still prisoners. Teddy and six seamen were to stay aboard the *Sham-pan* to guard us five Occidentals. The bulk of the Chinese were already bobbing up and down in badly overcrowded life-boats at distances of a few hundred yards from the old steamer.

The captain's dingey put off from the ship and was rowed rapidly toward the submarine by the four seamen who were in the conspiracy. The bomb lay beneath a thwart, within easy reach of old Sing Wo in the stern sheets.

Teddy brought sea-glasses for himself and me, and through a half-shrouded port-hole we watched the progress of Sing Wo's desperate plan to save our gruesome cargo from desecration.

The submarine began to run in rapidly, its gun trained on the dingey. When a cable length from the tiny craft it hove to.

We saw a man in the conning-tower raise a megaphone to his lips. No doubt he was asking why there were no white men in the dingey. Sing Wo stood up, dignified even through the glasses, and shouted between his hands.

"Velly solly, master, white mans all dead; me havvee ship paper," I could imagine him calling.

There was a consultation on the conning-tower. Then the dingey was ordered to come alongside.

THAT picture is unforgetable. The blue, swelling Mediterranean, the gray life-boats gently rising and falling, filled with huddled coolies, the great grim submarine glistening in the warm sun, and that frail cockle-shell carrying five Chinese on their errand of preposterous bravery. I had little hope of their success. I knew that even if they could get alongside without arousing suspicion the efficacy of the crudely made bomb was very doubtful.

I wanted to take my eyes from the glasses, but I could not. The lenses were wonderfully strong; even the clear-cut features of the U-boat's commander were distinguishable. He was debonairly blond and lean. He seemed so young, such a handsome boy, that I felt a momentary glow of pity for him, an insane desire to warn him. This vanished when his face wrinkled with rage as he shouted an impatient order at Sing Wo. There was no telling when an Allied warship might happen along, and the Austrian wanted to be done with this job quickly.

The bow oarsmen in the dingey shipped their oars. One of them threw a line deftly across the submarine. An Austrian seaman caught it, and strong hands hauled the little boat alongside.

Sing Wo had remained standing since he had answered the U-boat's first hail. One hand lay on the steering-oar. The other hand was hidden in his clothes. We knew it clutched the hammer we had seen him pocket. Now, whipping this out, he bent forward and struck.

Nothing happened. Hurriedly he raised his arm again. The Austrian commander pointed at the old man, and an Austrian seaman leaped on Sing Wo just as his arm went down the second time.

There was a glare as if some one had

suddenly opened the door of a gigantic furnace, then a rush of air and thunderous sound that capsized two life-boats and shook even the distant *Sham-pan* like the first burst of a typhoon. Where submarine and dingey had been the water was leaping and lashing skyward.

The only traces left of these two craft were a few splintered fragments which plopped into the sea about us a few seconds after Sing Wo blew himself into Buddhahood.

THE lifeboats still afloat saved a few of the unfortunate coolies from the capsized boats and returned to the ship while Teddy and I liberated Benson and the two engineers. Amory was still unconscious and remained delirious for days.

With Benson in command again we got under way. Teddy and the quartermaster were never punished for their part in the insubordination. Benson, although weak, was not a bad sport. His report of the strangest mutiny perhaps ever chronicled was fairly written, and all sorts of posthumous honors were bestowed on the four seamen and Sing Wo by the Allied Governments.

To the Chinese, of course, the very word posthumous is absurd. As the *Sham-pan* poked her way to Shanghai over waters ever blue and ever smooth, the conduct of our coolie passengers and crew showed that to them Sing Wo and the four seamen were now more alive than ever. Candles burned for them, it is true, and prayers were said for them in the gloom below decks around the corpses their bravery had saved for proper burial. But the way the living referred to them proved how real to these coolies was what we Westerners speak of glibly as the immortality of the soul. Throughout the rest of that weird voyage we learned how actual to a Chinese is the oneness of past, present and future, the unity of the dead, the living and the unborn.

The self-immolation of Sing Wo and the four seamen was not a sacrifice of the living for the dead, as it seemed to us Occidentals. It was a sacrifice of men living in one state for men living in another, a sacrifice which those Orientals believed had saved the souls of our coffined fellow voyagers from insult and degradation unthinkable. And it was a martyrdom which had sent Sing Wo and the four sailors—despite the dissolution of their own bodies—on to a plane much higher than the condition they had known in this world.

This belief in the continuity of existence—so instinctive in Buddhists that it is part of the very breath of the East—far surpasses in intensity similar convictions held by any but the most fanatical Christians. It could never be quite comprehended by lifelong materialists like Benson and me.

But the other lesson of Sing Wo's heroism was as clear as the tropical seas which bore us on to Shanghai. As Dredge Amory had said—

"Courage is mostly a question of what a man thinks is worth fighting for."

A Complete Novelette
SLAMASHILA MANI
By Ferdinand Berthoud
Arthur Schwieder

Author of "A Lone Hand," "The Man Who Had Only One Ear," etc.

THE fierce African sun, beating on the parched sand drill ground, sent ripples of waving heat haze dancing away in a fine mirage. The roof of the tin canteen was hot enough to fry steak on and inside the air was still and blistering. Nothing but the flies had strength enough to move. And that but seldom.

Without a thought but of how limp they felt and how glorious it was to get a good excuse the crowd lazed round the bar. A crowd of the toughest men in the British South Africa Mounted Police. And that's no idle compliment.

Bulawayo is never cold for long, and in that Summer of 1896 it did its best to keep from spoiling its record. For which those thirsty men just thanked the Lord.

"Whisky! Whisky!" a little policeman called in a loud, gasping whisper as he came in through the open doorway.

With rough, blind, shaky carelessness the little fellow pushed his way on through the crowd and laid a jumpy hand, palm upward, on the canteen counter.

"Whisky!"

"What's the matter, 'Cockney?' Important business?"

"Whisky!" the little man repeated dully. His eyes, behind thick glasses, were glazed, and the upturned palm played a steady tattoo on the wooden bar.

"Whisky!"

At a gulp a stiff four-fingers went gurgling away and the empty glass came down with a sharp bump.

"Whisky!"

Readily the bottle slid over to him again and, feeling carefully, the little man poured unseeingly.

And that drink, too, slid down.

"Whisky!"

"What's up, Cockney?" the canteen barman insisted. "'Fraid somebody's going to drink the whole supply and you won't get your share? Here, let me pour for you. You'll spill it."

But even as a last year's breeze on a next year's ewe lamb the gibe passed off unheeded.

"Whisky!"

"What's the trouble, Cockney?" Spring asked teasingly, and the long, curly beard on the huge sergeant's face shook merrily. "Why the race? Who's in the race besides you?"

The little man's eyes, through the thick, unaccustomed glasses, came round to Spring and gazed up at his new questioner dazedly. The eyes came back and at long distance peered vaguely at the thumping palm.

"Whisky!"

The whisky came and one hand, with assistance, poured, then lifted up the glass. The other hand stayed just exactly where it was and kept on beating time.

"Come on, Cockney? Come on, Alf? Fair doos. Let's all be in on this. What's the betting?" big Spring insisted.

For just one second the bleary eyes saw Spring indefinitely, then attention came back to the hand and once more to the bottle.

"Whisky!"

And a fifth drink went down.

Lovingly Spring pushed an arm round the little Londoner and drew him aside. With intense seriousness he placed his lips close to the little man's ear. He whispered:

"Be a pal, Cockney. Don't keep things like this to yourself. How d'you do it so quickly and cleverly? And why?"

The little man's weak eyes thoughtfully searched the floor. Minutely they appeared to scan the bar and ceiling. Dreamily they came round to Spring. A hand went up—the hand which didn't tattoo—and the thick glasses came away.

"Them glawses! Them blawsted glawses!" the little man said quietly.

And hopelessness—a depth unplumbed in hopelessness—was in every letter of each soulful, quivering word.

The thick owl glasses went safely on again and without any fraction of trouble whatever the laughing Spring faced the little man back round to the counter.

"Two whiskies, Smasher. Poor Cockney says he's dry."

Two whiskies came and Cockney's slid straight down. Admiringly the bearded Spring stood off and looked on in amzement.

"Alf," he said rapturously, "that's wonderful! That's marvelous! If wearing glasses'll do it I'll wear glasses, too. But why d'you drink left-handed?"

Ruminatively the little man stared at the open palm. Slowly he brought it closer until it almost touched his nose. With the thoroughness of a scientist trying to split an atom he examined it over and over again.

"Them bleedin' glawses!"

And still the eyes stared on.

"Don't they suit you, Cockney? Can't you see through them?"

"See fru 'em? Course I c'n see fru 'em. But I cawn't get used to the messin' things. Keep on lookin' over 'em an' out the bloomin' sides."

The bearded sergeant laughed and laughing patted the small man on the back.

"That's nothing, Cockney. You'll soon get over that," he said happily and made to take the little fellow's pattering hand.

"Aough! Don't touch that blawsted 'and," and Alf jumped madly back. "It's bit."

"Bit?" and at once big Spring was deathly serious. "What bit it?"

"What bit it? A *voerschlack*. A bloomin' whip lash."

"A wha-a-at?"

"A whip lash. Denys, the transport rider, awsked me while I was fiddlin' rahnd if I'd clean up a *voerschlack* for 'is mules. I worked free or four 'ours on the bleedin' thing. Piece of raw 'ide, it was."

"Oh, and so you cut yourself," big Spring said pacifyingly.

"Nah! I'm bit. Bit be a whip."

The sweltering crowd stood round and calmly waited. Waited for Cockney to curl right up and die.

And carefully with eyes an inch away from sweating skin he went once more over the flattened palm.

"It's that there bleedin' Musters," the little man explained. "Ever since Cap'n Musters said I was no more use in the p'lice an' put me on to boss the 'boys' in the garding— Me lookin' awfter bloomin' sweet peas an' roses an' honions an' dysies!"

The little fellow's voice trailed off into sheer dumb disgust. And there it stayed. Stayed while the palm had just one more inspection.

And all the crowd kept silent, for speech was too hard work.

"That bleedin' Musters!" the small man went on presently. "That bleedin' Musters! Said I was too blind to ride a 'orse a-gyne. An' got me these 'ere blawsted glawses!"

Once more there was deep silence. And Cockney's eyes were running. Weakly they passed across the open palm and searched and searched in vain. A hot tear dropped.

"An' I got bit," the little man said sadly.

Kindly but firmly Spring gripped the trembling hand. Smiling he looked it quickly over.

"Bit? If that hand got bit, Cockney, that hand got bit by rattiness. There's not a mark on it. Can you feel anything?"

With painful seriousness the bleary eyes looked up. With pained voice the little man went on.

"Rattiness be 'anged! I'm bit. Bit be a whip." For a second the small man hesitated. "At least 'twas a whip when I put it dahn," he finished lamely.

And then the company roared. Roared with no trace of sympathy.

"You put down a whip and picked up a

snake," Spring howled. "And the thing never bit you at all."

The outstretched hand came lamely down and the spectacled face went sheepish.

"Well, I wasn't goin' to tyke no bleedin' chawnces. I didn't know if snyke bite 'urt or not an' I couldn't see if there was any 'oles. D'you blyme me?"

"Not a bit," and the kindly Spring thumped a back heavily. "Not a bit. And where was this snake when it bit you?"

"Aht by the gytewye to the garding. 'Angin' on the rylin'."

"Still there, Cockney?"

"Blymey, no. It's lyin' on the grahnd dead somewhere. The bloomin' boy behind me killed the bleeder. Only a little squirt of a thing it was. 'Bout free feet long."

"Oh! Just a baby," Spring said disinterestedly.

But, while speaking, an eye winked wickedly. One man sidled up.

"Go see if you can find that dead snake," Spring whispered. "Must have been a whipsnake crawling on the fence and Cockney mistook it for his lash. Let's pull the little fellow's leg."

The sweating, dripping crowd lined up, and Spring bought two full rounds. Lazily his eyes surveyed the crowd; then, satisfied, the big man bought again.

With glass held high appraisingly Spring looked toward the ceiling.

"Here's a go, Cockney. 'T'ain't often I drink with the dead."

" 'Appy dyes."

"That was a narrow squeak, Slamashla Mani. You'll have to practise with those glasses before you take any more risks."

"Blawst the glawses!" the little man burst out. "Don't rub it in an' call me Slamashla Mani. It's bad enough to have to wear 'em wifout bein' called 'Four Eyes.' "

"That's all right, Cockney. You'll soon get used to 'em and then come out with us again. God never meant a policeman to live by picking weeds."

"Nor snykes, neether."

"No, Cockney. If I were you and I thought they wouldn't trust me on a horse again sooner than pick weeds I'd chuck it and go back to London."

The little man's hand swiftly came down. With a bump his glass hit the counter. The ruddy face went gray. The mouth sagged limply.

"Blymey, no! No bloomin' London," the little fellow gasped. "I'm syfe aht 'ere. An' syfe I'm goin' to keep."

"Safe?" and the big Spring rippled gaily. "Safe, Alf, and you play tag with snakes?"

"Snykes? Well, snykes only bites you once. An' snykes cawn't talk all dye, anywye." Thoughtfully the little fellow stopped and pondered. "An' night," he added seriously.

The missing man quietly returned. Slowly he edged his way through the crowd and up to the bar and tightly pressed against the Cockney.

" 'Bout my turn, isn't it?" he called to Spring across the little man. "What's everybody going to have?"

As though surprized Spring turned his head, then wedged the Cockney on the other side. And all the crowd pushed in. While something slipped gently into Cockney's pocket.

"Whisky," Spring answered wearily. "I don't know anything else."

Professionally the men poured and measured with the eye, then all stood off.

"Here's to our next," and the glasses went on high.

"Here's looking at you."

"Here's——"

But Spring's full glass came down untasted.

"Why, Cockney, you little fool, you're crazy! You never put that whip lash on the fence at all."

The little man's face indignantly went round. The bleary eyes looked watery fury.

"Cryzy? You're cryzy yourself. I put it there an' a snyke got up an' knocked it off."

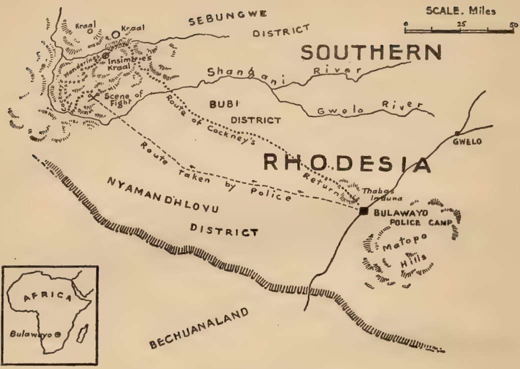
"Go on, Cockney. You're batty with the sun. Got the tap. You never put the whip lash on the fence I tell you. Just slipped it in your pocket."

"Gwan! I 'ung the bloomin' thing up when I went to stop Blullyfool plantin' honions wif the dysies."

Spring's right hand waved round gracefully. A finger pointed and, pointing, almost touched a breeches pocket. The other hand with ponderous meaning tapped a forehead.

"Mad, Cockney. Absolutely mad. The *voerschlack's* in your pocket this very minute and hanging out."

Blearily, dreamily, completely mystified the little fellow's hand felt down. And shakily it gripped the hanging lash and drew


SEBUNGWE DISTRICT
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25
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SOUTHERN RHODESIA
Kraal
Kraal
Insimbye's Kraal
Scene of Fight
Shangani River
Gwelo River
BUBI DISTRICT
Route of Cockney's Return
Route taken by Police
GWELO
Thabas Induna
BULAWAYO
POLICE CAMP
Matopo Hills
NYAMANDHLOVU DISTRICT
AFRICA
Bulawayo
BECHUANALAND

it out. Shiveringly, tremblingly the hand and lash came up and close before the heavy glasses.

"Ugh! Wah!" and the thing hit the wall sharply twenty feet away. "It's that there bleedin' snyke a-gyne!"

The little man's hand reluctantly loosened it's hold on the door-post and he stepped out into the open. The sun on the parched plain beat back like a huge flat, yellow flame and the bleary eyes saw fire. And nothing but fire.

For a moment the small man stood and teetered thoughtfully then, at a venture, aimed for the garden. Aimed blindly.

"Ha-ha-ha! *Lo M'Lungu maninge dargale,*" came loudly from somewhere twenty yards ahead.

The voice was a welcome guide post and the small man knew it, but his face had to pucker in fury.

"Who the —— 's drunk? You mind your own blurry business."

The laugh came back again and the Cockney steered for it.

Biff! And he charged full into the railings. And clung on.

"Can't you see where you're going, you drunken fool?" a voice a dozen feet off roared.

With studious care the little man straightened up.

"Sher'n'ly I c'n shee," he announced with perfect gravity. "Bloomin' rylin' got in wye. Thass all."

The owner of the voice came up and lightly gripped a shoulder.

"Drunk again, eh, Cockney? You're getting to be useless."

Roughly the little man shook himself and freed his shoulder.

"Not drunk a-gyne. Who the —— you talkin' to? 'S them blawsted glawsses." For a second he paused, then shook a dignified head. " 'S shame drunk, anywye," he admonished.

More firmly the helping hand gripped him again and aimed him for the gateway.

"Come on, Cockney. D'you expect me to get all the fence taken down just so's to make a big enough gateway for you to wabble through without killing yourself?"

A hand went out and firmly clung to each side the opening. Shakily the little man braced himself.

"You go 'wye," he said warningly. "You takin' 'vantage. Just 'cause you're offisher think you c'n talk me like that?"

With little effort Captain Musters undid the little man and shoved him on.

"Come along, Cockney. Come and lie down."

"Shan' come 'long. Goin' wash Blull'fool water panshiesh. An' liliesh. Wanna wash 'im wa'er liliesh."

Grimly the Captain grinned to himself and pushed his captive on.

"Be sensible, Slamashla. Mani. Don't be a fool."

In a second the faltering feet went still. The body stiffened. The wabbling march stopped chock.

"Don't you call me 'Slamashla. Mani,' Cap'n Mush'ers. Don' you call me 'Four Eyes.'" And the weak eyes tried to blaze. The six-foot captain laughed. An all-embracing laugh.

"Don't be silly. You know we mean nothing when we call you 'Four Eyes.' Don't they call me 'Gertie's Papa'?"

"Yesh. But you're offisher. C'n call you anythin'."

The bunch of living fury commenced to wilt and Captain Musters again took up the white man's burden.

"Easy now. Just a few more steps. Then I'll put you on your stretcher and make you comfy."

For a dozen yards or so the weakening feet staggered on; then the going became slower and slower. The feet mixed and still worse mixed. Dizzily the little fellow struggled to halt and get them sorted out.

"That malaria certainly didn't do a thing to your sight, Slamashla Mani. You're as blind as a bat."

Once more a violent wrench, a furious struggle. Once more the weak eyes shot a watery blaze.

"T —— wif that Slamashla Mani! T'—— wif——"

The captain dodged aside. The vicious blow passed by him. And just as he should hit the ground the captain caught the flying man and saved him. Easily he swung him over his shoulder. Kicking, hitting and swearing the little Cockney was borne helplessly home.

And like a naughty, fractious kid he lay and cussed himself to soddened, dreamless sleep.

THE horses were fitfully picking their way through the high grass. The dry stalks cut them, the thorny bush ripped them, the holes and rocks, deep covered, were hidden and an everlasting pitfall.

All day long—for three solid days long—the body of horses and men had pushed forward. And for two nights in the still African moonlight the men, ever on the alert, had rested and swapped whispered lies.

Half a mile ahead on the brow of a rise two horsemen halted and looked leisurely over the country rolling far ahead. For a moment the main body of police halted and waited. The two men turned and one man waved a hand. Then at an amble, a broken tripple, the horses moved ahead once more.

"Over there. Behind those hills," Spring said as the troop reached the top of the hill.

"Over there," the little man riding beside him assented thoughtfully. "Abaht firty mile or more to go yet."

"About that. And only think in behind those hills they've killed every single soul. Every white farmer, every miner and prospector. Every man and woman." The big man hesitated. "And child," he added viciously.

"Yes, my —— Tortured an' murdered 'em—the poor 'elpless bleeders."

"Tortured! The ——!"

The riding men ahead drew farther away; the flankers spread more widely. Slowly the tiny crowd of police descended the slope and struck into the level plain. The bush, higher than their heads, closed round them as though a sea. Each man saw just his neighbor. And nothing more.

"Firty mile," the little Cockney muttered again. "Firty mile. There ain't no bloomin' dynger yet."

"You know as well as I do, Cockney, there's danger every second. Some peering eyes have seen us from the top of the last hill. Of that you can be sure."

"But they cawn't see from them 'ills. Them 'ills is all 'aze."

"Hazy now, Cockney, but on a clear day I wouldn't like to bet their eyes can't reach this far."

The little Cockney smiled wryly. "Them Kaffirs don't get no malaria, then."

"No, Alf. And to make sure, as you know, they'll have outposts out every mile or so in each dangerous direction. And Insimbe'll know all about us and how many we are long before daybreak to-morrow."

"The blighter, eh? Well, he ain't got no more to murder, anywye. Excep' us."

Twisting and dodging from bush to bush and round bush after bush the little mob went on. At times a snake stopped in its wriggling march in startled curiosity, then shot away like a flash of living ribbon. Insects buzzed and screeched and shot jets of filth at the intruders. And always and everlastingly gaudy-hued lizards raced out of sight in all directions. But of human life or of signs of human life not one faint trace.

"Mye as well be in 'yde Park," the little Cockney suggested, "but for the bleedin' bush."

Then his horse rose a good four feet on high and the mamba it had trotted over squirmed frantically away.

The blazing sun, like a huge red ball, tipped the edge of the far horizon. As though pushed down it slid away and the long shadows became faint dusk. The sudden African night closed in.

"We'll camp here," Captain Musters directed as they came to an open space before a line of greener, fresher looking trees. "We can at least see a few yards round us, and there's a sluit ahead. There should be waterholes somewhere in it."

"There used to be," Spring told him, "but the season's been so dry."

The weary, sweating horses halted and the men off-saddled and rubbed them down. A couple of men detached themselves and made to hunt up water, a few were busy collecting wood for fires.

Carefully Spring went over a penciled list and ticked off eight or ten names on it.

"You're a lucky little beggar after all, Cockney," he said laughing. "Those glasses are quite an asset. I can't put you on sentry or outpost duty with those on."

The little man looked hurt.

"Sentry duty?" he blurted out disgustedly. "Men don't want eyes at night in this 'ere bleedin' bush. They want ears."

"You're right, Cockney. Ears and eyes. And noses."

The little fellow sniffed.

"Gwan! I don't want no bloomin' Kaffirs near enough for me to smell 'em."

The frogs in the sluit piped shrilly. Piped their shrill call mixed in with throaty croaks. Water. Water in a dozen places. From somewhere in the bush a jackal yapped a querulous, woman's yap and from a point a mile or more away a wandering jackal howled an answer back. Then as the moon sailed up the breeze went cold and all the eery sounds of the gentle African night rose on the clear, thin air.

By the side of a blazing fire Springs quatted and watched the water boil for tea.

"The freest life on God's free earth, Cockney," he said ruminatively. "Yet for all we know death may be looking at us not even a hundred yards away."

The little Cockney smiled and the aching eyes seemed to be piercing a vast distance.

"Free, Spring? Yes, this is freedom. It's 'ard to think that we're not syfe, ain't it?"

"Hard enough, Cockney, with this still night around us. But less than fifteen miles away inside those hills we saw there's hell."

"Them blawsted Kaffirs!"

"Yes, Cockney. But when you come to think way back from their point of view we're really in the wrong. You can scarcely blame them."

"Blyme 'em? If the bleeders'd only kill us decent. But this 'ere torture! An' women an' kids, too. It's bad this time."

"You bet it's bad, Alf. That's why Musters brought out every man he could lay hands on. That's why he brought you out along."

For a second the little fellow gulped, then smiled wryly.

"Oh, I c'n shoot awright. A fellow don't look out the sides or over 'is bloomin' glawses when 'e looks at a sight."

"Not if he ever wants to see his home again."

The little Cockney winced. Then smiled. Smiled a queer smile. And stupid.

"That's *if*," he murmured strangely.

The blazing fire died down and Spring threw on more sticks. Fresh flames sprang gaily up. From a slight rise a good five miles away the rumbling roar of a lion echoed and rolled through the trembling earth. The shuddering roar went out, and in the deep silence the almost silent wings of a passing bat seemed noisily disturbing.

"What ever made a little man like you, Cockney, come away out here and join this mob of toughs?" Spring asked presently. His bright eyes smiled true friendship, the big beard shaking with a happy laugh.

"I wanted to be syfe."

"Creditors? Police? Joined the police to escape the police?"

"Police? Naw! Nor creditors, neether. Who's goin' to give a bloke like me credit enough to run awye from?"

"What was it then, Cockney? This isn't the kind of life a man like you hankers after."

"It is, though. It's the only life worf livin'."

"Yes, but what put it into your head in the first place?"

The little man was silent. In the uneven firelight what might have been an unasked blush spread over his thoughtful face.

"What was it?"

But still the man was silent.

"What was it, Cockney? Girl?" big Spring insisted.

The blushing face went really red.

"Girl? No. 'Ooman."

"Woman! Some skirt you got tied up in. I'd never have thought it of you, Cockney."

"Thought what?"

"That you'd be messing about with other fellows' wives."

The little man looked daggers. Unspeakable disgust.

"Stash it, you bloomin' ijjut! There was no other fellow."

"No other fellow, Cockney?" and Spring laughed loudly. "And you let a girl throw you over and took it so to heart you sent yourself to exile?"

With scathing pity the little fellow's eyes searched into the other's.

"Frow me over? No bleedin' fear. No 'ooman ever got a chawnce to frow me over."

"What? You married her, Cockney?"

"Naw!" and the profound disgust was absolutely, superbly perfect. "The bleeder married me."

The cold, clear moon rose higher and by its light Spring stared incredulously upon his neighbor.

"Married you, Cockney?" he said with earnest sympathy. "Poor little devil!"

"Yuss. Married me."

"And what were you doing all the time that she was getting married?"

"I wasn't doin' nothin'," the little fellow pleaded.

"That's why."

"Why what?"

"That's why she married you."

The little fellow's eyes came round in sorrowful rebuke. "What in —— *could* I do? She weighed firteen stone six."

The waving beard of Spring stood straight out in the air, his face aimed at the stars. The piping frogs were speechless as his great laugh rolled by.

"What's hurting you?" came over from the next fire.

"Hurting? There's nothing hurting me, Musters. It's Cockney who's hurt. The little shrimp just said he'd let thirteen stone six marry him."

"Thirteen stone six! A hundred and eighty-eight pounds! ——!"

"Yuss!" the little man agreed emphatically.

"Well, it was your own fault," Spring ventured. "You must have given her encouragement."

"I didn't."

"But you must have, Cockney. You must or else she wouldn't have insisted on marrying you."

"I tell you I didn't," the little man declared unalterably and savagely. Then for a moment he was silent. "She was a widow," he added presently. And his speech was very, very weak.

And once again Spring laughed.

"Poor beggar! And so you thought it better to come out here and chance fighting Kaffirs than to stay at home and argue with her?"

"It was syfer," the little man observed.

"But what was the trouble, Alf? The main bone of contention?"

"Trouble? The fambly."

"What? Too much mother-in-law?"

"Mother-in-law me foot! No, the fambly. The ready-myde fambly. 'Er byby."

"Oh, I see. She had a child when she married you. How old was it?"

" 'Bout free years."

"And how old was it when you left for Africa?"

" 'Bout free years an' a week."

A howl came from Musters and all close round joined in. Kaffirs and danger might have been a million miles away.

"Quite a quick actor," the captain said admiringly. "Marry in haste and repent much hastier. How did the final bust-up come about?"

"That bloomin' byby."

"You didn't like the kid? What was it? Boy or girl?"

"A little girl. An' she was always 'idin' things an' that 'ooman blymed me."

"Poor Cockney."

"Yuss," he said miserably. "An' then one dye she said I'd drank 'er fours-abaht."

"Her wha-a-at?"

"Her stout," big Spring explained.

" 'Er fours-abaht. The doctor told 'er she was weak. 'Er weak! An' then the bloomin' rotter said she must drink staht. At every bleedin' meal, mind you!"

"Well, that was all right, Cockney," Musters soothed. "A big woman like that—thirteen stone six—needed something to keep up her strength."

The little man's disgust was freezingly sublime.

"I didn't mind the staht," he muttered bitterly, "but the bloomin' 'ooman twitted me with pinchin' it on 'er."

"And I suppose you did," Spring laughed.

"Staht! Would I drink fours-abaht? I don't drink no 'ooman's stuff."

"I'd hate to trust you with a bottle now, Cockney."

"Shut up!" the little man's voice threatened. "That dye she said I'd pinched 'er lawst four bottles I told 'er I'd never even say 'fours-abaht' a-gyne in all my life. Fours-abaht!"

"And so you came out here?"

"Yuss. I 'ad to go somewhere for peace." The small man's voice died off into a whisper—to a mere movement of the lips.

"An' syfety," they seemed to finish up.

For one more careful day the little band moved on. The bushy plain lay far behind and all around were hills. Hills growing rougher and higher as they drew deeper into them. Hills with great, bare, overhanging rocks. Great holes and caves and rifts.

Hill after hill was surrounded and rushed, yet only to find the kraal on top of each completely deserted. Not a living native or sign of a living native in sight. But of relics of recent feats and relics of things more awful there were signs a-plenty. Gruesome parts of many a gruesome body.

Once more the sun went down and a mile away from the foot of the last kopje they'd raided they made camp for the night.

"No harm in making fires," Captain Musters said. "They'll never attack till dawn if ever they attack at all. And my opinion is they'll simply keep moving out of the way and doing all the damage they possibly can."

"That sick Kaffir we picked up this afternoon seemed to think so," Spring remarked. "Said there wasn't a single Kaffir left in all the hills at first, but after a bit of prompting explained that Insimbe's men were massed at Mashabi's forty miles away."

For a while Captain Musters was thoughtful.

"Mashabi's? There's not enough of us to rout him out of there if he is," he presently observed. "But if that Kaffir we found says he's there you can depend Insimbe's quite somewhere else."

"That's my opinion," Spring agreed. "And our finding that sick man was no great accident, either."

"Where is he, Spring? I said to bring him along."

"He's skipped. Waited until we got alongside that last rocky hill, then bounded away like a buck."

"Then we'll need extra guards tonight. Tomorrow morning?"

"Tomorrow morning," Spring decided.

But though every horse was saddled an hour before dawn and every man stood ready sunrise saw the country as free of Kaffirs and as innocent of any enemy as ever drill ground on a Sunday morning.

"Too innocent," the captain murmured dubiously.

"A much too obvious quiet," Spring surmised.

And each man shook his head.

The afternoon was wearing on, the roasting sun deep in the west. For hours the men had ridden through a winding, heavily bushed plain more than a mile wide, on each side of which were towering kopjes. More than once men had climbed those hills to scan the country beyond. The valley narrowed; the scouts, a good half-mile ahead, moved up a rise and passed into a beetling gorge.

"That Kaffir was right, Musters," Spring mentioned wearily. "There's not a black skin left in all this district."

"Seems like it, Spring. They've done their work and cleared."

"Just bit and ran."

The men in the gorge reached the narrowest, highest point. Quietly they reined in and appeared to be making a careful survey of the land on in front. Then one man looked behind where they had passed.

"Zipp!" And he fired his rifle excitedly back and at the side of the lazily moving police. Then his arms worked furiously.

From each side the little band of men came scattering shots; then, twisting and dodging, the men of the flanking parties rushed back into the main body.

And with them in came hell.

From every covering bush, from every shading rock, in every clump of grass rose painted, shrieking Kaffirs. Hundreds of them. Thousands. Each man with flowing head-dress, each man with ox-hide shield, each man with bloody murder in his heart. A few had old trade rifles, the rest sharp assagais and native battle axes.

With howls and shrieks and piercing yells the painted men rushed in. A shower of assagais came through the air ahead of them and some hit wincing flesh. Others fell shivering deep into the burning sand.

Instinctively the police separated and fired at any moving thing. And for a moment the onrushing Kaffirs took cover as best they could. Then, screaming, on again.

"Make for the kopje on the right. Get on higher ground," Captain Musters shouted above the noise. And, backing and charging, the little crowd made for the rise.

A horse or two went down and their riders backed on foot. Once or twice a hiss or curse went up as an assagai found its mark and was wrenched away. And more than once a man went down and didn't rise again.

The howling mass of Kaffirs still kept close around on every side and still the rain of assagais was falling. Gingerly the horses picked their way through dead or wounded natives, and several times those wounded men gashed savagely at moving legs as they passed over them.

"Right in the gizzard!" the little Cockney said grimly as a Kaffir fell and he rammed his breech block back again. "——! All the wye for tuppence!". And then another Kaffir kicked and sprawled.

"You seem to like it, Cockney, but it's no joke," Spring muttered as he hastily filled his magazine. "You wait till they get right in."

"We mustn't let 'em, Spring. Now watch this bleeder."

A savage head peered round a bush and Cockney's bullet caught it squarely. The Kaffir didn't even scream.

"Free shies a penny!" the little fellow piped. And once again he fired.

The backing, pushing horses were nearing the foot of the hill. And still the Kaffirs dodged from bush to bush and kept around them.

"The trouble's coming now, Cockney," Spring cautioned. "We'll have to cross the open to get high enough to see them."

"They'll 'ave to cross the open, too."

"I know. Don't let them get you, Cockney—alive."

"I ain't a-goin' to."

"Be careful."

The Cockney's horse jumped high and screamed. Quickly the Cockney turned his head. An assagai was firmly in the horse's buttocks and trailing out behind.

The Cockney wrenched and threw it far away.

Into the small open space the police were crossing the Kaffirs madly rushed. Yelling and howling, with stabbing assagais poised, they bounded in. The police drew their revolvers, the last backing man turned. Together they charged blindly up the rock-strewn hill.

And from above a new—a thicker—rain of assagais fell on them.

A screaming Kaffir charged the little Londoner and hissed. The stab passed harmlessly against his saddle and the little man's revolver barked. A hiss the other side of him and the revolver barked again. Then a shield hit up against him flat.

The shield stayed wedged, the face behind it glowering. Instantly the little man rose in his stirrups and crashed his clenched revolver butt down on the Kaffir's head. The Kaffir howled and jumped away. Ziss! And the assagai stabbed savagely.

The frantic horse squealed loudly and swerved on two hind legs. Squealing it spun completely round. On every side the Cockney were vicious, sweating faces. And cursing, howling mouths were everywhere.

The little fellow's revolver went empty and at once he clubbed his rifle. A dozen men stabbed at him, but his squealing horse spun round again. Then helplessly the little fellow loosed the reins to use both hands.

A Kaffir seized the reins, then promptly fell with brains all spattered. And another man grabbed at them.

The rifle butt fell. And missed. The Kaffir at the horse's head seized it and jerked it furiously away. And then—just then—the Cockney wondered.

Furiously the Kaffir brought the rifle up and swung. The frightened horse squealed madly and sprang into the air. And as it did a floundering hoof ripped tremblingly out—and into the Kaffir's chest. Ripped and tore down completely through his stomach.

With agonized screams the horse kept twisting round and wildly, hopelessly the little Cockney gripped the saddle before him. Then of a sudden in crazy, maddened agony the horse charged blindly through the ring of Kaffirs, an assagai, deep in, streaming and flapping as it ran.

The horse charged through the Kaffirs and at the Kaffirs. A dozen hands reached for the reins but the terrified beast dodged by them.

Grimly the little fellow sat as assagais hissed past him. Grimly he clutched the saddle and numbly held tight on. His face was cold, his teeth were clenched, his brain quite dead.

A crowd from out the howling mob turned with him and, leaping, raced along. Chance assagais still fell and more than once one grazed against the horse.

But panting, charging blindly through bush and over bristling rocks the frantic beast rushed on. Gradually the chasing men seemed fewer, seemed to get further away. The sounds of firing soon were getting far behind.

Slowly the little Cockney's mind began to work again, his brain faintly to act. Mechanically the little fellow's hands felt for the reins. And found them cut.

The shivering, bleeding horse went on. Galloped, yet slower and much more shakily.

The horse left the bush and charged into long grass. Charged for a hundred yards through grass above its back.

Both fore feet plunged deep down into a hidden ant bear hole. The horse's brisket touched the ground.

Once more the horse screamed loudly.

And Cockney turned a somersault and promptly went to sleep.

The little man's eyes opened and he weakly moved a hand and felt himself. The open eyes saw nothing and he closed them tight again.

Once more the eyes went open and in painful puzzlement he rubbed them. Rubbed them and still he couldn't see at all.

Wearily the little fellow stroked his open shirt. Damp all over! Dumbly it flashed into his muddled brain that it was night. And for a while he lay just as he was.

A hard, half-whining breath sounded a few feet away. Wonderingly the little man came to himself again and listened. The troubled breathing kept on and he turned himself over and got on hands and knees.

With nervous care he crawled the few long feet to where the breathing seemed to be. A hand touched something—touched sweating skin—and then his throbbing brain woke up.

"Poor blighter!" he muttered sorrowfully. "Poor bloomin' pal!"

Stiffly he leveled himself to his feet, then felt along the shivering, quivering horse. Still in the buttocks stuck a five-foot stabbing assagai. With teeth set at the thought of it the little fellow ripped the assagai away, the weakened horse making but a single fretful whimper.

Then once again the small man felt along the quivering skin. Whizz! And with all his force he drove the blade in where he best guessed the heart would be.

"Poor blighter!" he murmured once again. "You poor old beast."

The little man turned round and walked to where he'd lain. Unthinkingly he went on hands and knees and felt ground. Mechanically he felt the sand. Then grass and thorns and bush. His shaking hands touched fretfully at everything in reach. And still he wasn't satisfied.

Again he felt around, felt carefully, painstakingly and far. And once or twice the small things which he touched moved off.

The little man sat down and for a moment thought. Dazedly he reached to a pocket and produced a box of matches. With deep meditation he counted to see how many matches he could spare. Then, as the breeze for a short moment died, he struck the matches one by one and hunted slowly round.

Carefully he examined the spot where he had fallen. Carefully he inspected the ground beside the horse. Every rock and foot of sand and towering clump of grass. And all he saw was rock and sand and grass. And that but hazily and dimly.

But half a dozen matches still remained. Dumbly the little fellow pondered. With a sickly feeling he closed the box and pushed it back into a pocket.

Roughly he kicked and hit a patch of grass down flat, then wearily he lay and straightened himself out. Weakly, exhaustedly, hopelessly he slept and waited for the dawn.

Without his glasses!

The sun was high and blazing when the little man came to himself. Each bone seemed cracking, each muscle stiff and dry. Fretfully he reached beside him and felt his water-bottle. The bottle was half full and warm. Greedily he drank the best part of it, then struggled to his feet.

Unthinkingly he shook himself. The bruises from his fall had hardened and his body seemed like one big sore. Dully he felt himself and rubbed himself, then looked toward the horse.

The horse was one great blurr!

For one full minute he stood with eyes firmly closed. The eyes went open. And still there was a blurr.

The little fellow took a couple of shaky, hesitating steps. The outlines of the big blurr moved. Puzzled he stood and closed his eyes once more, then opened them and took another step.

The blurr moved. Moved distinctly. And he heard it!

The watery eyes strained painfully and he walked on. The blurr moved in a dozen places. Moved noisily.

Anxiously the little fellow halted dead. Halted and listened. Then turned and staggered horrified away.

And as he staggered more blurrs came down from out the sky and joined the flock of gorging vultures on the fresh-killed horse.

The Cockney swallowed hard.

The shadows were solid beneath each bush, the sun directly overhead. Wearily the little fellow sank beneath a tree and pulled the stopper from his water-bottle. Greedily he drank the last remaining steaming drop.

And for a while he rested.

An hour later appraisingly yet dreamily he inspected himself and counted up his goods. One clasp knife and still six matches. With a wry smile he opened up the tin opener and corkscrew in the knife, then closed them and hung the knife away back on his belt.

And once again he wandered out.

The grass was high above his head and slowly he pushed through it. At first the stalks had cut him, but he'd long since found a stick to use to push a way. And for an hour or more without the faintest thought of aim he beat his path along.

The grass grew shorter, then died away completely. Happily he stepped out into clearer sand. Sand with scattered tufts of bush. The weak eyes roved around, but past the nearest clumps of bush saw nothing but gray smoke.

Thoughtfully the little fellow stood and gaged the sun overhead. Smiling he turned aside and picked his way in the direction in which he thought his troop had come.

And still he staggered on.

The blinding sun poured on him and in the fierce hardness of his blind march the sweat dripped down in little rivulets. Soon his mouth caked with parching thirst, his lips went cracked. And then he stood in dumb dismay.

Back in his saddle bags were rations! And he had never thought of them!

The little fellow laughed. Laughed loud. Thought of them? With that vast horde of vultures there? And he unarmed and almost blind!

Laughing a silly cackle he started on again. Took up the march to nowhere.

The hills closed in and for a while he skirted them. Fear that if he climbed up he might fall back kept him on level ground. Dully he kept along the foot of the hills the while the sun went lower.

And then he knew that he was circling round.

Uncaringly he turned aside and took a line away. And steering by the sun he held a wabbly course.

The shadows were growing longer. But one hour more of light. The little fellow's throat was aching, his tongue like prickly sand. But one more day like this and he must die.

The sparse scrub turned to bush, the bush to grass. The dry grass became green. Hopefully the little man pushed on and dryly licked his lips.

The grass seemed damp, then came a line of trees. Trees like a line of shimmering ghosts which reached up to the sky. The Cockney's nose worked fast. The Cockney's weak eyes gleamed. Smiling he pushed his way along and through the dancing trees.

Beyond a sandy beach, the far side that clear water. Water that gleamed and glistened like mirrors in the setting sun.

Laughing the little man skipped down and tripped across the sand. Two yards ahead was water. Still, clear, sweet smelling water.

A log lay on the water's edge. The little fellow lifted up a foot to step across it. Lifted a foot, found the log too high and stepped upon it.

Gratingly the log moved and commenced to turn.

The stepping foot came back and

shivered. Shivered and splashed into the yielding sand.

The moving log came round, twisted into a half circle.

Squealing the little Cockney jumped away. Sobbing he wildly charged toward the high green grass.

And whimpering, blubbering like a little child, he tore his maddened course along.

A mile away beneath a tree the little fellow lay and shivered. The red sun touched the hill tops, poised for a second, then softly slid away. Ten minutes more and the bright night had fallen.

With pounding heart the little man rose to his feet and stared with blinking eyes into the tree above him. Shakily he felt the size of the trunk and roughness, then reached above and groped around for limbs.

The waving hands gripped at a stunted, broken branch and jerkily he raised himself, then carefully felt above and all about. The limbs were fairly thick and mostly strong enough and once more the Cockney rose another foot or so.

Again the hands went up and tightly gripped a bough. Something at rest upon the bough—something cold and soft—wriggled beneath his hand and curled around his wrist.

Frantically the hand came loose and furiously the little fellow flicked it. The wriggling thing flew hurtling through the air and Cockney's other hand slipped free.

Struggling he wilted backward and, grabbing wildly at things he couldn't see, he fell bumpily from bough to bough.

Gasping he lay still in the grass below.

And once again he sobbed.

The soft, cold dew fell on him and soon he felt refreshed. And with the coolness came new hope.

Half undecided a hand went to a pocket and the box with the six lone matches came slowly out. Blearily the little man held the box close and peered at it. Then sadly he shook his head.

Fire meant safety from prowling things, yet two-legged death might see.

Sorrowfully the matches went back and the little man lay down once more. And for a while he dozed. Dozed fitfully.

Crack! And he jumped up wide awake again and a frenzied animal rushed off into the distance. And as he stood there wondering the chasing lion passed not a dozen feet away.

The small man's blood froze still and his knees knocked together. His head felt queer and he sagged down again.

And all that frightful night, wedged tightly up against the tree, the little man sat firm and listened. Listened with weak eyes staring. And staring eyes quite useless.

Not twenty feet away a prowling hyena halted and quietly looked him over. And Cockney never knew. Yet when a long full mile away the same hyena turned and laughed the small man's tired spine went trembling.

Swift jackals raced close to him and scuttered off in terrified surprize. Yet in the shadows the dull eyes never saw them. Nor did they see the slinking leopard whose green eyes hungrily pierced through and through him.

Or the wild cat which crouched upon a branch above.

Yet every breaking twig or snapping blade of grass cracked like a rifle to him, and buzzing insects sounded like whirlwinds in the still night.

And as the morning sun streaked up above the horizon a small, weak, hopeless man sat with arms gripped round hunched up legs.

And silently he sobbed.

With cracking legs the little man stood up and stared straight at the sun. Painfully he sucked his tongue and tried to wet his lips. Then lifted high his arms—and winced.

The useless eyes stared round and round, then once more at the sun. Again the small man strove to lick his lips.

The drawn face smiled. A smile of hopeless doom. One at a time the small man moved his legs and tried them out. Then slowly stepped away.

The sizzling sun went higher. And still the little fellow staggered on. Through bush, through scrub, through grass. The grass went high, went low, went thin, went out. Sand, and for most a mile clear sand.

The way began to rise and rocks were looming large. Clumsily the little man went over them or limply passed aside. The rocks became bigger, higher, whiter. Rocks of a beetling hill.

The little man kept on and soon the rocks were split. Numbly his weak brain showed him this was a well worn path, yet numbly his brain refused to tell him more. And teetering, staggering, wabbling like a drunken man he wandered up and up.

The path began to twist, then zigzagged right and left. On without a thought the little fellow went.

The rocks had disappeared—but a dozen feet away—and the week eyes searched round blankly for them. The eyes saw nothing and the path went widening on.

On the thin air a faint sound trickled down. The little man stood still and, scarcely breathing, listened. The sound came down again. A deep, full, rumbling voice.

Smiling the man went on, the aching brain seemed useless. And up and up he went.

Again the voice came down. And once again he stopped. The words were indistinct. But they were human.

Perhaps the police!

The tottering feet moved faster. Attempted a piteous run. The rocks fell right away. A great flat, open plain.

Two fluttering forms rushed to him. Two wiggling charging forms.

The small man's face lit up. A deep "Thank God!" burst out.

The hazy forms came one each side him. Each roughly gripped an arm. Quickly the little fellow's nose twitched sharply. Twitched a suspicious sniff.

The eyes bulged out, the jaw sagged down. The opening mouth was yammering. Then the lips closed. And opened.

"——!"

The shouting, glorying Kaffirs rushed him with them as though he were a toy. The tired legs stumbled and still they rushed him on. Roughly they lifted him, then let him slip and drag.

Voices from everywhere came echoing. Voices of men and women, shrill squeals of childish joy. From everywhere poured forms. Dark, sinewy, lithe forms. Dark, cruel, savage forms. And forests of waving head-dress swaying and fluttering as they moved.

The stinking crowd closed in around and yelled and danced with glee. Danced and gesticulated, leaped and mouthed and shrieked. Shrieked filthy taunts and screamed a wild revenge.

Grimly the little fellow set his teeth. Grimly his dull brain told him to try to hold his peace.

The glorying Kaffirs pushed ahead; the crowd in front danced back. Dancing they led the way toward the center of the open square.

And there for one long moment the whole crowd stood and yelled.

A tall, gaunt, hideous man rushed from a thatch-roofed hut. The howling crowd, in sudden fear, divided and the tall man jumped along the pathway they had made. A dozen crouching leaps he made, then landed dead before the trembling little man. Firmly his captors held the little fellow and faced him to the hideous man. The man grimaced, stood close, and with long, pointed claws made a pretended vicious slash right at the small man's eyes.

The Cockney simply saw a blurr. And innocently he smiled.

The gaunt man jumped away and howled in mad surprize. Again he sprang almost upon the little man and slashed within a foot of his pale cheeks.

The small man saw a shadowy blurr. And once again he smiled.

The tall, gaunt, hideous man backed off in sheer unfeigned dismay. Backed off a score of feet and stood in puzzled thought. Howling he made a maddened rush, jumped high, came down within six inches of the little man.

The Cockney wondered why the sudden shadow. And smiled.

The gaunt man turned away. Cunning witch-doctor of a cruel tribe—for once the man felt beaten. That a policeman right away out there alone was blind could never enter his savage head. And they'd pounced upon him far too quickly for him to realize the white man couldn't find his way.

Puzzled, the witch-doctor walked slowly into his hut and slowly came back out again. The happy, grinning natives still held their helpless prize.

Thoughtfully the gaunt man wandered down the open lane of men, a grass woven, covered basket swinging from one hand. Meditatively he placed the basket on the ground and looked up curiously at the little man. The gaunt man's eyes were troubled.

With anxious care the gaunt man moved away a flap of covering skin from off the basket. Swiftly he slid his hand inside and made a dextrous grip. The hand came out trailing a long brown mamba, the snake wriggling to fix itself around the arm.

The gaunt man rose and stood a short

yard from the quaking white man. Grinning a hideous, yet mystified and wondering grin he watched him for a moment silently. Then lifted up the mamba and held its open, willing mouth three inches from the small man's nose.

The small man saw a feeble, shimmering blurr. And smiled.

The gaunt man dropped the reptile back and saw it safely in. Then straightened up and made a slow, queer sign. Quickly the happy grinning Kaffirs loosed their furious hold and took the Cockney lightly by the rolled up sleeve The happy grins turned instantly to scowls of bitter disappointment.

And in deep, disgusted awe they moved their prisoner gently off.

The huge Insimbe stepped toweringly out into the open and casually watched the silent procession coming toward him. With fierce, resentful eyes he glowered at the white man and waited for him to come closer up. Lazily his vengeful brain questioned the awesome silence.

The guiding men convoyed the little man up to the big chief, then quickly stepped aside. The following crowd halted a score of yards away and waited curiously. Nervously the gaunt man stepped before his chief and made a ponderous bow. Then stood and looked him queerly in the eyes.

"*Tagati!* Witchcraft!" he said, and lightly tapped his forehead.

The big chief scowled and took a long stride forward.

"*Ikona tagati.*—The white man is shamming."

Glowering Insimbe stooped and brought his face until it almost touched the Cockney's. His mouth opened wide and he made as though to bite.

The small man noticed a cloud before the sun. And smiled.

Insimbe straightened up and motioned to the gaunt man by him.

"He's shamming," the chief insisted. "Or else the man is mad."

The gaunt man turned and pointed. Pointed to something foul which lay upon the sand outside the kraal. Sharply the gaunt man beckoned and the same two Kaffirs again caught hold of their prisoner.

More gently they aimed him and steered him as they went. Went to the grisly, awful thing outside.

The torn wrists were still tied to pegs deep in the ground, the feet still tied and wide, spread-eagled out. The dead lips, hacked away, showed firm set teeth. The nose and ears were gone. And where the eyes had been were ghastly sockets.

The chest was ripped, the body scarred. And on the stomach a charred spot where a small, slow fire had burned.

The Cockney's keen nose twitched. Twitched like an anxious cat. Carrion the keen nose said. Carrion two full days old.

The silent crowd drew up around the cruel remains, the small man and his holders close at the very feet.

The gaunt man grasped a shoulder and a neck. Grasped it and forced the small man firmly down. The small man's face came not two feet above the rotting thing. Came, and the gaunt man moved the Cockney's face around so that it couldn't miss a part of all the fearful crime.

The weak eyes saw a huge flat blur. The keen nose smelled a stench. The Cockney wondered why. And smiled.

In superstitious fear the big chief moved away. In unfeigned terror the gaunt man moved along. The watching crowd, with wondering mouths sagged open, backed a safe distance and stared with frightened eyes.

"Witchcraft it is!" the huge Insimbe murmured harshly.

"Witchcraft!" the gaunt man muttered as an echo.

"Witchcraft?" the little Cockney thought as the oft-repeated word suddenly sank in.

And once again he smiled.

The little Cockney loudly called for food. A score of anxious Kaffirs hastened to fetch what he required. The little fellow sharply demanded water. And water came at half a dozen hands.

Smiling the small man called that a man should be put to attend him. To guide him in a kraal he didn't know.

A trembling Kaffir at once was singled out and shiveringly took up his job as most unwilling servant.

Fearfully the big chief backed into his own great hut and crouched down on the floor. The gaunt witch-doctor entered scaredly and crouched before him, and for a while witch-doctor and coward chief consulted.

A mad man! And a white man! That was unnatural. Some magic somewhere beyond their savage understanding. White man or black no sane man could have such fearful nerve. None but a crazy man or a born idiot could stand such tests or see such awful things unmoved. Something outside their ken was happening in their midst. Happening far too close for ordinary comfort.

Hopelessly the chief decided they couldn't keep the man there yet dared not harm him. And the gaunt man hopelessly asserted they couldn't turn him out.

The big chief rose and slowly went outside the hut. Loudly he called to where the Cockney squatted and furiously ate. Then harshly ordered the men round to fix a clean hut ready for the little man and take good care of him.

And on a bed of soft karosses—of soft brayed goat and sheep and buck and leopard skins—the little fellow peacefully slept the whole long afternoon.

Slept as a little child safe in its mother's arms.

The glowing sun was sinking as the small man gently woke. Cozily he turned himself and rested on an elbow. The weak eyes roving round the hut halted at the entrance. Light and dark were quite distinct. But nothing more.

And yet the small man smiled.

Quite well he knew the trend of what the Kaffirs said. Quite well he knew their superstitions and that in fancied madness lay his safety. And, Cockney that he was, he'd play it to the end.

Smiling the little fellow waited for the next move and felt the night come on. Yet numbly wondered what the next move would be.

The Kaffir servant entered and laid a dish before him. Beside the dish a calabash of Kaffir beer.

"*Nangu skoff, M'Lungu.*—There's food," the Kaffir muttered shakily; then just as quick as legs and space would let him he sought the open air.

Eagerly the little fellow attacked the feed of steaming meal. Attacked it with all the hunger of a starving man.

The last full spoon went down and the little fellow started in to scrape the dish.

"Blymey!" he murmured in happy comfort. "This ain't so rotten. Better than roostin' in a bloomin' tree. An' syfer than——"

"O-o-o-o-oh!" a long drawn, hollow, tortured groan—a groan dismal as the howl of a tortured soul in ——, floated in from a hut a hundred feet away. "O-o-o-o-oh!"

The little fellow's jaw dropped loosely, his half-raised hand went open and the wooden spoon fell down.

"O-o-o-o-oh!"

"O-o-o-o-oh!"

The awful groan went high and trailed away to nothing, then rose again and dragged in horrid tune.

"O-o-o-o-oh!"

The little fellow's weary eyes went round in helpless terror, his well-filled stomach quivered, his very soul went sick.

"O-o-o-o-oh!" and a screaming curse in Kaffir. Then "O-o-o-o-oh!" again.

The little man stood up and staggered to the moonlight. Loudly he shouted for his serving man.

The groaning voice said—

"O-o-o-o-oh! O-o-o-o-oh!" and muttered a stifled curse.

Then let a howling, screaming screech.

"Mercy! Mercy! Help!"

The open space outside the hut was silent. Again the Cockney shouted loudly. And back again came —

"Help!"

Vaguely the little fellow wandered out and made toward the place whence came the sound. Perhaps thirty feet he'd gone, a few uncertain steps, before a tall, gaunt man loomed up and stopped him. The gaunt man made a sudden call.

A vigorous Kaffir firmly gripped each side the little Cockney and turned him round. Firmly yet carefully they steered and pushed him back. And softly they pressed him down and left him on his bed.

Shivering he lay there still and listened. Listened and shivered till his very spine went cold.

"O-o-o-o-oh! O-o-o-o-oh! O-o-o-o-oh! Hlep!"

And all that fearful night and well toward the dawn the small man heard that piteous "O-o-o-o-oh!" And over and over and over a hundred wracking times a whining, pleading "Help!"

"O-o-o-o-oh! Help!"

The day was well advanced before the little man woke up. Killed though his hunger was, the past events and night of fearful noises had had their dire result. And nature answered.

The nervous, squatting servant, anxiously waiting for the little man to waken, quietly rose and brought in food. And as the Cockney ate the unwilling servant stood and watched him.

"Where was the dog which howled all the night?" the little man asked smilingly. Fully he thought to get no clear reply, so asked off at an angle.

The Kaffir smiled queerly.

"In that hut which stands at the far side of the kraal from Insimbe, *M'Lungu*," he answered willingly.

"What was the matter with him?" the Cockney queried hopingly.

"Sick, *M'Lungu*. Very sick."

"Hurt? Wounded?"

The Kaffir laughed. A cruel, rasping laugh.

"Hurt, *M'Lungu*. Badly hurt. The dog was white, *M'Lungu*."

For a moment the little fellow hesitated and wondered if he'd dare to take a chance. Ingratiatingly he smiled.

"Take me to him, *madoda*. I want to see his hurts."

Without the least reluctant sign the serving Kaffir instantly agreed.

"When the *M'Lungu* has eaten I will guide him."

With studied slowness the little Cockney ate, then rose and made to move.

"Take hold of my arm," he told the waiting Kaffir. "My legs are tired and weak."

Carefully the Kaffir held the man's shirt sleeve and steered him. Out to the open plain and through the blazing sun. And carefully, very carefully the little fellow reckoned out his direction and counted every step.

Just ninety steps and then a square thatched hut. The Cockney reached a hand and felt the flat square side. Sharply they turned a corner and quickly stepped inside. The Kaffir servant halted stiff.

Inside a gloomy, dull half-light. A bare earth floor. No sign of blanket, box or any single thing.

The Cockney moved across the floor. Then stood and listened. A rasping, grating breathing struck his ear.

Slowly, short step by step, he drew across to where the sound appeared to rise. His foot hit against something which gave. Something soft and big.

The something groaned, turned over and looked up.

"Cockney!"

"Gaw' blimey, Musters! You?"

Quickly the Cockney sank upon one knee and felt the trembling man before him. A deft hand went over him and gently made a search.

"Musters! Good —— man, 'ow d'you get in 'ere? An' what in ——'s name 'ave they done to you?"

"Horse fell and pinned me down for just a minute. And then they got me. There were too many of them and they overwhelmed us and drove back all they didn't kill. Last night they cut the soles from off my feet."

"The lahsy devils!" the little fellow fairly hissed. "That's what I 'eard, then."

"Yes, cut them off. And made no gentle surgeon's job of it, either. And from their talk tomorrow night's full moon."

"Full moon? What difference will that myke?"

"Tomorrow night's full moon, Alf. From the kind way they threatened and promised they mean to kill me then."

"The lahsy bleeders!" the little fellow said wholeheartedly.

"Yes, kill me like poor, suffering Saunders. The fellow they pegged out outside."

The little man's rejuvenated brain went cold, his keen nose faintly twitched.

"Saunders? Pegged aht? Then that's the thing I smelled."

"You smelled him, did you, Cockney? How was it you didn't see him?"

"Them glawses, Musters! Them blawsted glawses! I lost the messin' things."

"Lost them, Alf. How was that?"

"Fell off me 'orse. The poor old blighter tumbled in a 'ole an' broke 'is legs."

"Poor beggar!"

"Yus, an' I killed 'im. Then I got 'ungry an' thirsty an' scared an' wandered all over the bleedin' shop."

"But how d'you come here, Cockney? Where did they catch you?"

"They didn't catch me, Musters. The blighters couldn't catch me. I got worried an' muddled an' stumbled right bang clean into Insimbe's kraal."

"The ——, Cockney!"

"Yus. An' then they saw my bleary eyes an' must 'ave thought that I was cryzy. I think they must 'ave tried to scare me too. I dunno."

"My ——!" the captain said and almost smiled. "You ought to thank your lucky stars for wearing glasses and losing them.

But for that you might now have been where poor Saunders is."

Both men lapsed into silence, the little Cockney deeply thinking. The captain changed his stiff position and looked up at the roof.

"Tomorrow night they'll kill me," he muttered presently. "Unless I kill myself instead. Have you a knife, Alf?" For just a second he paused. "And here I'll have to leave you, too blind to get away," he added sadly.

The useless eyes went damp and strove to peer close in the captain's face.

"No fear. You ain't a-goin' to leave me," the little fellow said emphatically.

"It seems it has to be," the captain whispered hopelessly. "Perhaps you'll be rescued or find a way back out."

"Of course I'll find a wye, Musters. An' you, too."

"*I* find a way, Cockney? Why, even if I could I can't stand up, much less walk out."

The little fellow's bleary eyes went really wet. Bravely he tried to stop them and forced a fluttering smile.

"Walk, Musters? Who the —— wants you to walk? I'm goin' to carry you."

Wincing the captain turned upon one side and stared in dumb amazement.

"*You* carry me? Why, Alf, you're really mad!"

"Mad me foot! Of course I'll carry you," the little man insisted.

"But, Alf, you little shrimp, you can't. I weigh thirteen stone six!"

"Firteen stone six! That's nothin'."

Slowly the captain's agonized face took on a curious smile.

"Nothing? A hundred and eighty-eight pounds?"

"That's nothin'."

"And it's a hundred and twenty miles to camp!"

"That's nothin'."

"But, Alf, you can't. I tell you it's impossible."

The little fellow's face went hard, set firm in pained disgust.

"It's not. What's firteen stone six, anywye?"

"Lots more than you can carry."

The little man's strained face went blank. Somewhere in some strange way professional pride was wounded.

"Firteen stone six!" he said deep in his throat. "Firteen stone six! Didn't I used to be a porter in Covent Gawding Mawket? I c'n frow little weights like firteen stone six rahnd wif one 'and."

The captain's pains went out and he reached up a hand.

"You're fooling, Alf. Just trying to make me happy."

"I'm not," the little man insisted angrily. "I'll tyke you on my back just like a little byby."

"And I can't walk and you can't see! Nice chance we'll ever have!"

"Shut up," the little fellow ordered sharply. "That's my business. You do the seein', let me do the walkin'."

The reaching hand gripped harder, the captain's eyes went misty. "And I said you'd never again make a policeman and put you on as gardener!" the captain said ashamed.

"Oh, that's awright," the little fellow whispered.

More hopefully the captain lay and slowly thought it out. Grasped at a straw, yet hoped it was a tree.

"I don't suppose there'll be any guard with me tonight," he mused assayingly. "There'll scarcely be a need to stop me running off. Unless," he added quietly, "they come to worry me again."

"They'll let you be," the little man assured. "Leave you to keep your strenf so that you'll suffer all the more."

"The ——! I think you're right, Cockney."

"Yus. An' there won't be any guard wif me. I'll tell this bloke to go an' you c'n bet 'e will. If 'e don't go I'll bite 'im."

The little fellow turned a scowling face upon the waiting Kaffir and worked a yammering mouth.

"I'd like to bite that bleeder, anywye," he mentioned casually.

The shivering Kaffir moved a shaking foot and stepped a long pace closer toward daylight. The Cockney's estimate of his appreciation of his job was pretty nearly right.

"An' 'ow about a gun?" the little fellow queried.

"A gun?" the captain asked in great surprize.

"Yes, a rifle. You don't suppose that we c'n go two weeks wifout no food. An' I cawn't live on grawss," the little fellow feebly grinned, "even if I am a 'orse."

"But a rifle, Cockney! And me! You'll never carry all that lot."

Again the little fellow grinned. "At Covent Gawding," he explained, "they c'd always put just one more bawsket on me 'ead."

"I know where my revolver is, then," the captain thoughtfully said. "At least I did know. They put it in a hut two huts away from this. Put it with the rifles and saddles they captured off us."

The little Cockney rose to go.

"Then I'll be 'ere tonight. Soon as the kraal gets quiet. Don't go an' get upset, Musters."

The captain's face, bright with new hope, smiled broadly.

"Upset? I never felt so fit in all my life."

The clear, bright moon was high, the jet black shadows shortening. Quietly the little Cockney rose and crossed the well-swept floor.

OUTSIDE the kraal was silent—silent as in a country of the dead. Away off in the distance a wandering mongrel dog was howling. And from a scraggy tree an eery owl called. But all around inside the kraal was deathly, wierdly still.

With confidence the little fellow stepped outside the hut and carefully gaged his direction; then, on tip toe and noiselessly, he crept off.

Just ninety steps and then the square hut loomed before him. And with an outstretched hand he felt along its walls. Quickly he found the entrance, went in and listened for the slightest sound.

A breathing, a heavy breathing, and it seemed nothing more!

"Musters!" the little man called in a sharp whisper. "Musters!"

His voice went out and nothing stirred, so slowly he went on. The inside of the hut, after the bright moonlight, was as black as sin and for a while he hesitated and stood again, then sharply called once more.

And still no answer.

Cautiously the little fellow moved a couple of paces on. Moved till his foot struck at a soft resisting something.

The little man stooped wonderingly and lightly gripped an arm. His other hand went down to help him lift.

A grappling hand came up and seized one arm as in a vise. A reaching hand caught at his throat and held a grip of steel.

The little fellow's keen, sharp nose went busy.

Then both his hands were working overtime.

The lithe, strong Kaffir made to rise and fall upon him. The little Cockney readily collapsed and let himself fall flat.

Quickly he wrenched his right arm from the grip, then fiercely squeezed the Kaffir's throat to stop a chance of noise. His two legs locked around the Kaffir's body and, squirming like a pair of snakes, the struggling men rolled over.

Gasping for breath the little Cockney loosed his hold upon the throat and raised the hand that held it to try to free himself. Instantly the Kaffir drew a rushing, gurgling breath and made to start to shout.

Both hands together pounced upon the Kaffir's throat and madly tried to pound his head upon the floor.

And all the time the Kaffir's grip upon the small man's windpipe was firm and tight as though 'twere some machine.

And once again they rolled, and rolling kicked and jarred with knee to stomach.

The Kaffir loosed his hold upon an arm. Wildly his hand clawed round and sought the white man's face. The clawing hand ripped down across the forehead and thumb and finger came almost together in the eyes. And gouged.

The little Cockney tried to squeal. The grip upon his throat was killing. Hopelessly the little fellow let both hands go free. And he, too, gouged for eyes.

Hissing the Kaffir tore his hand from round the Cockney's neck. Hissing he seized the wrist which lay above his face and with both hands wrenched at it.

And Cockney's other hand went back to squeeze the neck.

"Musters! Musters!" the little fellow called soon as his aching throat allowed the breath to pass.

"Musters! Musters!"

A troubled breathing from the wall close by stopped and a faint voice called across.

"Where are you, Cockney? What's the trouble?"

"Come 'elp me. Quick! This blawsted Kaffir's got me an' the bleeder wants to yelp."

"I can't help, Cockney. I'm all trussed up."

"Roll over, then, an' get my knife an' open it."

"I can't. I can't. I'm fastened to a peg."

"——!" the little fellow said with horror. And then his nails dug deeper in eyes and throat and the Kaffir's body squirmed.

One hand let go the Cockney's wrist and found his throat again. The fingers felt behind the windpipe and clenched to come together.

The little Cockney gurgled.

Hopefully the little man's hand left the Kaffir's bleeding, half-blind eyes. The hand went swiftly to his hip and to the belt around him and shakily unhooked the hanging knife.

Gurgling and fighting for just one gulp of air the little fellow bravely tried with teeth to open the big blade.

The blade was rusted and far too firmly fixed to move.

Snorting the little fellow wrenched fiercely at the tin opener. His other hand meanwhile still tightly gripped the Kaffir's throat. The tin opener was fastened so teeth on it were useless.

Desperately the small man turned the knife around and clenched his teeth upon the corkscrew. Bit it and worried like a dog. Sharply the corkscrew jerked aside and stood away at a right angle.

The grasping, straining hand quickly let go its hold upon the squirming Kaffir's neck and closed upon his mouth. With every ounce of force he still possessed the small man plunged the twisting screw into the rasping gullet.

And frantically he stabbed at it again and yet again. And ripped and tore and slashed and gashed.

"——!" he said weakly.

Then limply he crawled off.

A few short moments the panting Cockney rested and wiped the trickling blood from face and neck. Then felt his way to where the captain called.

"I tried to pick the blighter up," the Cockney laughed above his several pains. "Thought 'e was you. ——! I'd a job to stop 'im shoutin'. It's lucky all these 'uts are pretty far apart."

"Hurt much?" the captain asked. "It made me almost vomit to listen to you struggling and know that I was useless."

"That was awright," the little fellow said. "'E wasn't nothin'."

Soon the little man forced his knife open, then felt around and cut the fast tied thongs.

"They must have been suspicious when you left," the captain, freed, explained. "Put a man here to guard me and bound me up as well."

"A —— of a guard, 'e was!" the little fellow snorted.

"I should have kept awake to warn you," the captain went on guiltily, "but after that awful night last night and all this fearful day I somehow fell asleep."

"That was awright," the little fellow said again. "Before this ride you're goin' to take you needed lots of rest. Now show me where the guns are. But I must take my boots off first. 'Ere, you 'old 'em," he added presently.

The little fellow closely stooped and braced himself, then lifted up the heavy captain clear. Stiffly, yet careful of his feet, the captain eased himself around and on the small man's back.

"Are them there plates o' meat of yours a-burnin' much?" the little fellow asked solicitously.

"Like ——!" the captain said. "A fellow's feet are just about his tenderest place."

"Poor bleeder," the little Cockney soothed.

The little fellow staggered out into the moonlight, the big man on his back blinking painfully after being so long in the half dark.

Quite silently they moved across to where the guns were stored and into the hut. And there the Cockney laid his burden on the floor.

"Better feel for a rifle an' your revolver, too," he said, then stood aside and anxiously waited.

"Sure you can carry all this?" the captain asked.

"Certain I can. An' bring about a score of cartridges if you c'n find 'em."

The captain found the several things he wanted; then once again the Cockney lifted him and swung him on his back.

And creeping along like a criminal, fearful at every second that some stray dog might rush out yelping and get them back to worse than death, not even daring to take the shadow of the huts, the little fellow sneaked along.

Half way across the open square the little Cockney stopped. His heart stood still. Some gray four-footed thing was in the path.

"A bleedin' dawg!" the little fellow gasped, his weak eyes noticing a movement.

"Only a goat, Cockney. Thank God!"

"Blymey! I awmost dropped you," the little Cockney said, relieved.

And he crept on again.

The captain's lips were close to Cockney's ear and as they moved he whispered:

"It's a hard thing to say, Alf," he said, "with so many poor beggars killed, but it's good that we were licked. These Kaffirs feel so secure in victory that they're sleeping like dead men."

"We'll dead 'em yet," the little man asserted.

And still they crept along.

"I know this district well," the captain whispered again as they reached the edge of the kraal and struck the winding path. "A half mile from the foot of this hill there's a swamp runs back a long way from the river. We'll make for that."

"An' walk in the swamp so that it'll hide our spoor, eh?"

"That's right. It's a sandy marsh and the grass is high. Once through it and they'll never find us."

"Grawssy?" the little fellow ruminated. "That grawss'll give them tender plates o' meat of yours just little ——."

The happy captain smiled.

"Far better that, Cockney, than actual —— itself before a second sunrise."

"You're right, uncle," the little fellow said, and jolted on and down the twisting slope.

Just as the pathway ended the captain called a halt.

"You'd better rest here, Cockney, and put your boots on. There'll be no more rocks for quite a weary distance and I can sit on one of these without much fear of pain."

"Awright," the little man agreed. "I expec' I'll 'ave to drop you off a few times in the swamp an' let you rest on 'ands an' knees."

"I expect you will. Carrying me with mud up over your boots'll be no easy job."

"No worse'n carryin' a fifteen foot pile of bawskets on me 'ead fru a fick London crahd," the little fellow parried jauntily.

The captain forced a smile.

"Well there's one thing in our favor, Cockney. With all this scrapping and marching round of late the grass will be broke through in about fifty million places. They'll never follow us by broken grass alone."

"That's just what I was finkin,'" the little man agreed.

And every long hour of that bright African moonlight night the little Cockney floundered on. At times they rested; at times the rasping grass cut across the captain's tender feet and he was almost forced to whimper.

The little fellow's breath was coming harder, his progress getting slower. Oftener and still more often he had to stop and put the heavy captain down.

But one more hour till the first faint streaks of dawn. In the near distance a jumble of rocky hills.

"Just a few hundred yards more, Cockney," the tired captain said as cheerily as possible, "and we come to a place where the ground's as hard as steel. Then we can leave the swamp without the faintest trace."

"An' get into them kopjes?"

"Into those kopjes, Cockney. I know those kopjes well because I've reason to. In the last rebellion we found so many holes and connecting caves there we couldn't rout the Kaffirs out, so we had to get a crowd of Capeboys to do it for us."

"Good!" And the weary little man's pace quickened. "Then todye I'm goin' to 'ide there wif the bloomin' rabbits."

And when the glowing sun shot up and sent its blazing rays across the plain, safe in a deep-set cave the two men lay inert and rested.

And as a host of straggling Kaffir bands later in the morning crossed and recrossed the swamp in the far distance and searched in half a hundred places, the fatigue-wrought men slept innocent and heavy.

And with utter uncaring recklessness they loudly snored.

THE sun was high up on the morning of the second day. Thoughtfully the little fellow turned a corner in the cave in which they lay and weakly looked at daylight.

"We've got to eat, Musters," he said with firm finality. "Me stummick's wavin' up agynst me back-bone like a flawg."

"I think it's safe enough," the hungry captain pondered. "It ought to be. We made another dozen miles in the night."

"I fink we must 'ave," the little man

agreed. "An' there don't seem no sign of no more chasin' Kaffirs."

"I think they've given it best, myself, Cockney." The famished captain smiled. "I fancy they had reason to. Or thought they had," he finished.

"What reason, Musters?"

"I fancy they were scared. Just scared themselves."

"But 'ow?"

"Just fancied you had taken me away by magic, and they were afraid to follow farther. Thought it best to leave mysterious things alone."

The Cockney loudly laughed.

"Fine bleedin' magic! There ain't much bloomin' magic in 'umpin' you along."

The captain's raw and festering feet were paining and he winced. Thoughtfully his eyes peered at the feet, then at the weazened Cockney.

"I don't know, Alf," he said with plain affection. "It mayn't be really magic, but —well, it's —— near it."

"'Unger ain't magic," the little man decided sharply. "You've got to tyke the gun and chawnce a shot."

"If you don't feel too tired and think that you can carry me until we see a buck?"

"Tired? T'——," the little fellow snorted. "I'm starvin'."

The weary, burdened Cockney beat his straggling way through bush and scrub. In spots the grass quite hid him and the captain clenched his teeth to stifle rising screams as stalks hit at his feet.

Carefully the captain searched the country for any signs of life or any signs of danger. A second hour had almost passed before a tiny buck, nestling in the shade two hundred yards away, gave hope of welcome food.

"I'll get off here," the captain said as they drew slightly nearer. "You just stay where you are until I call and I'll crawl into better position."

"D'you fink you c'n do it?" the little Cockney asked uncertainly.

"Of course I can," the captain answered stoutly, but in his heart there was a doubt.

And when five minutes later the captain softly called his face was gray and serious.

"I missed him, Cockney," he said with deep disgust. "Those blasted feet! That slang of yours is pretty nearly right, Alf. They're plates of meat sure enough—and raw meat at that."

The hungry little Cockney smiled broadly.

"That ain't the kind of meat we're awfter, though. But never mind."

"I'm sorry—mighty sorry, Cockney, that I missed. I couldn't see above the grass to get up closer, and as I went to shoot the darned grass tickled and I winced."

"Oh, that's awright," the little fellow cheered him. "We'll soon fix that. You've got to do some of old Frank Fillis' circus tricks, that's all."

"Some what?"

"Some circus tricks. You've got to shoot off 'orseback."

And when an hour later the staggering little Cockney beat up wind within a hundred yards of a wondering duyker the captain fired from off his back. And that one shot went home.

And as the sun set on that glorious evening faint wisps of smoke rolled from the entrance to a winding cave and wafted high into the darkening air.

Close by the fire sat a little Cockney who smiled and hazily watched his cooking, while just beside him lay a waiting big man who thought the world was mighty good.

And not a Kaffir knew or dreamed that they still lived.

The evening of the fifteenth day came round. Thankfully the two men sat high on a rise and looked to where the police camp and little settlement lay like a white spot but six short miles distant.

"Tomorrow mornin' we'll be 'ome," the little Cockney said contentedly.

"Tomorrow morning, yes," the captain soulfully agreed. "Tomorrow morning. But, Cockney," he suddenly broke out, "why not leave me and go on and get some kind of conveyance? I could aim you straight and you could steer by the sun."

The Cockney's useless eyes came sharply round.

"Leave you?" the little man said queerly. "Leave you behind when we've come all this wye? No, uncle, I'm goin' to finish up me job. Finish it proper."

The captain's hand went out and touched the small man's arm.

"Cockney. I wonder if you ever feel you should forgive me. You're the best soldier that any gardener ever was."

The little Cockney blushed.

"Ferget it," he said and turned away.

In ecstasy the two men sat and still stared toward the camp. The glowing sun was falling, the night would soon be born.

"Did you 'ear somethin'?" the little Cockney queried presently. "I fought I 'eard a shot."

Carefully the captain listened—so carefully he held his breath. "I do hear something, Cockney. Something I hate to hear just now."

Each man went suddenly silent and each man's face went hard.

"It's firing, Cockney. Firing. And it's all around inside the camp."

"I fought it was," the little man agreed. "Nah what?"

"Trouble again, Alf. We seem to have escaped it and now run clean back into it. The police must have been driven right in and now the camp's surrounded."

The little Cockney's jaw fell loose, then came to with a snap.

"That's nothin'," he said decisively. "Kaffirs won't fight at night an' they'll be restin'. We'll start right nah, an' I shall tyke you fru."

"Take me through, Cockney? You'll never do it."

"Of course I shall. We'll creep fru in the dark an' get right close to camp. Then at the fyntest sign of dawn when the p'lice c'n see I'll myke a rush."

The captain put both fists up to his eyes and firmly rubbed them. Then took the fists away and stared almost with awe straight at the little man.

"It's magic, Cockney," he said with deep conviction. "Magic, and nothing else in all God's world."

The sentry pacing up and down inside the camp came to a sudden halt and stared out over the open space and to the line of bush far out beyond. In the dim morning light he fancied something inside the bush was moving, yet wasn't really sure.

For a full minute he stood and strained his eyes to pierce the gloom, then felt, rather than saw, a waving signal.

"Some trick," he muttered drowsily. "Some wretched Kaffir trick," and raised his rifle with pretense of firing.

The rays of light behind the horizon were shooting ever higher and the tired sentry more clearly saw a signal.

"Investigation needed," he murmured, and strolled to meet the man on the next beat.

The man took one good, all-appraising look, then turned and shouted—

"Spring!"

"You're right," Spring said the moment he came up. "There's some poor frightened white man there who wants to rush to camp."

Anxiously big-hearted Spring waved back, then turned and shouted loudly. A host of men came tumbling out from all directions. Quickly Spring explained.

"You fellows line up each side the passageway into camp. I'll shout to the fellow out there to chance it and if the Kaffirs interfere you fire each side him and let him run in between."

At once the men took up their positions and Spring called at the top of his huge voice.

And big Spring's mouth stayed open and his revolver clattered to his feet.

The man inside the bush stooped down. A lying form rose to sit up. Deftly the form was lifted and swung onto his back.

Then the little man charged.

The little Cockney left the bush and tottered into view. Full fifty feet, then yells went up and assagais began to fall. And as they fell a scorching rain of bullets came from the camp and whined each side the Cockney's head.

The little fellow bravely kept his staggering way, the assagais falling quivering in the sand around him. And firing men rushed out to meet him and help him in.

And grinning and puffing the little man came on.

But just another forty feet and then the darned thing got him. An assagai lodged in his calf and flapped and trailed behind as he went on. The little fellow winced. His steps were tottering.

"Drop me and pull it out," the captain muttered frantically and made to wriggle down.

The little man's grip tightened, his wabbling trot went slower.

" 'Old fast. 'Old tight. I fink I c'n do it. I fink I can. Mind them there plates o'——"

A whizzing, twisting knobkerrie sang through the air. Twisting it fell and skidded on a stone, then bounded up again.

The knobkerrie came hurtling up. Hurtled and twisted round and round again. Neatly it caught the little fellow just behind an ear.

Weakly he crumpled up, his legs sagged down. Limply the little man collapsed.

Flat on his face he lay, the captain safe above him.

And calmly, numbly he slid off into sleep.

THE glorious African sun shone down upon a crowd of happy men. On three sides of the flat parade ground lines of police were standing at attention. Behind them everywhere were groups of eager, laughing men and smiling women—several of the smiling women in nurses' caps and uniforms round the wheel chair which the virile Captain Musters now scarcely needed.

And in the center of them all stood General Lord Arthur Blumer, with Cockney facing him a scant two paces off.

For two long, weary months the little man had suffered; now with new glasses on he listened nervously to all his good points and suffered ten times worse.

The general read the message from the Queen, then made his own great speech. And with one hand above and eyes raised to it he held the thing most coveted of all—the rare Victoria Cross.

The general almost finished speaking, the waiting crowd prepared to scream a cheer.

Then on the road up from the railway station, up from the boat train from Capetown, came horses madly galloping. Teetering and swaying behind them a near-careening Cape cart.

The Cape cart drove on to the square, and men stepped out to stop it. It stopped, but some one rushed away and passed restraining hands.

A little, sharp-nosed woman raced over to the general. Raced over and roughly pushed herself directly in his way. Stood right before him, a hand upon each shoulder of the nervous little Cockney.

And Cockney's eyes stared right above her and at the rows of ribbon on the general's breast. Right clean above her and her six stone thirteen. Her ninety-seven pounds.

"Alf, you little blighter!" the acid lady blurted, her cheeky face six inches below his. "I fahnd the bleedin' fours-abaht 'id in the bloomin' byby's crydle."

The general's eyes still staid aloft, his good right hand came down.

"For valor!" he soulfully said. And pinned the cross upon the tiny woman's shoulder.

The little Cockney's set mouth trembled. His eyes came from the lengthy rows of ribbon. The eyes came faintly down.

And then a hand came up.

A savage push. The sharp-faced woman staggered. A savage push and her hard face went blank.

"Get aht, lahsy!" the little fellow growled.

The
CAMP-FIRE
A
FREE TO ALL
MEETING PLACE
for
READERS
WRITERS
and
ADVENTURERS
A. SCHWEDER

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue Ferdinand Berthoud says:

> I don't know how to spell Slamashla Mani—nobody does—but that's how it sounds.

AS TO our Camp-Fire Stations. Each, as it comes into being, is given a number, which may be called its "official" designation and which it retains throughout. Mr. Cox suggests that each Keeper might, if he cares to, choose a name, as well as a number, for his own Station. For example, a Keeper whose experience or interest lay chiefly in South America might like to suggest his particular welcome for comrades familiar with Latin America by the name "Southern Cross Station" or anything else suggestive of southern latitudes or of that continent in particular. The names of places or things suggestive or typical of places (like palms, pine trees, Rio, Klondike, landfall, forecastle, new chum, etc.) or of famous adventurers, places or events of history or recent times might also be used.

All a Keeper need do is write us the name he wants and we'll register it for his Station. In case of more than one wanting the same name, the first to be heard from gets it. A name, of course, is optional with each Keeper.

I WANT to make it plain in advance that our system of Stations calls for no money changing hands. There are no dues or charges of any kind so far as Camp-Fire and this magazine are concerned and if any Keeper were to charge for the services obligatory on him as a Keeper or attempt to turn his Station in any way into a money-making device his sign and number would promptly be taken away from him. Of course, if a Station happens to be a store, no one would grudge to its Keeper any gain to trade that might result from its being made a meeting-place, and of course, when a Station organizes its own local club it is free to charge its members whatever dues, fees, etc., may seem best, but it is the members as a whole, not the Keeper alone, who must determine any point concerning charges.

The Station idea is certainly taking hold solidly. Give us a year or two to develop them and I think we'll find we've built up something far bigger and more valuable than we'd thought possible in the beginning. Come across with any advice or suggestions that will hasten the good work.

SOMETHING from Uncle Frank Huston concerning the death of the Apache Kid:

Napa County, California.

I am very much interested in Bob Heckles' account of how his pardner, one Clark, killed Apache Kid.

IN 1896, coming out of Mexico, I ran into the 7th Cav. at Boeie Station. The commanding officer, Col. (later Maj. Gen.) M. V. Sumner, Jr., invited me to stop over with the command and later came to me and we had a long "wa-wa" on old times and men. Apache Kid's name came up and Sumner said, "Oh, there's no doubt the Kid is dead. Died of smallpox up in Squaw Basin. Josh went up there and identified the corpse and buried the body." I give his words verbatim. Josh was an Apache scout, had been with Crawford in Mexico when the captain was killed. Old Billy, another 'Pache scout had been along at the same time. Now then, in 1904-5, Capt. Wm. D. Conrad, U. S. A., Ret., and myself, camped in Squaw Basin on the sites of both the old camps of 'Pache Kid, moving from the first camp when Andy Mills rode in and told us that we were sitting on infected ground.

LATER at Ft. Grant, we talked with Josh (who once went out and brought in his own brother's head to the commanding officer at Grant (Col. Royal, I think it was, but won't be sure of this), and Old Billy, the scout, after selling me an old pack-horse, adopted Conrad and myself and spent all his off time in our quarters.

Both asserted that the Kid died of smallpox, Billy saying "mebbe so no dead, but planted anyway," and "Pooh! all rotten like ——. No pick him up; too soft; push him in hole."

A man one night went into Andy's corral and took his two horses, leaving a couple of worn out plugs. Andy heard them leaving and went out, following down into the Aravaipa, where the doctor homesteader (name forgotten) told him whom he was following. As Andy later remarked to me, "I hadn't lost Kid's, and —— quick turned round and put for the ranch again. Horses? ——! I was —— glad I wasn't lost myself!"

IF CONNECTION is had with Andy Mills, Willcox, Arizona, or the Nortons (Barney is alive yet) or the Morgans, and the old Judge at Bonita (I forget his name also) or the blacksmith who forged the leg-irons for Billy the Kid, when this coot killed his first man at that same "hog ranch" at Bonita, you will find no man killed 'Pache Kid.

Col. Tompkins, now of the 7th Cav., may tell you something of the Kid that others haven't got. Might ask him.—UNCLE FRANK.

IN OUR December 10 issue, in connection with "Camp-Fire" and "Ask Adventure," you'll remember the short general article, "Africa, The Vast and Savage," by William Ashley Anderson of our staff. It is the first of a series, not all so long as that, many of them very short indeed, and run "every now and then." There have been several similar articles, by Edgar Young, concerning Central America. These were the outgrowth of his "A. A." work, but it happens that they, and several more to follow, are in line with the idea of this series, though the series plan, as first worked out, included only tabloid data.

Here's the idea. We in the office find that, while we know a little about most parts of the world, when it comes right down to definite facts and conceptions we are sadly lacking in many cases. Had been going along satisfied with a few definite facts and a too hazy general conception as to this or that part of the globe. Just as in the case of maps—a fellow thinks he has a pretty clear idea of the map of some place, but let him try to draw that map even roughly, or be really definite as to relative locations, etc. Of course, in some cases we can muster a pretty fair knowledge among us—Mr. Anderson, for example, lived years in Africa, and Mr. Greene also. But the world's a large place. Well, we figure that most of you are the same kind of critters we are and that, while some of you know more geography than we do, there isn't any one of you who knows it all. Also, we find, when we get right down to it and gather the facts about some country or locality previously hazy in our minds, that we get a whole lot interested in what we dig up. Here, again, we figure you're no different from us and are likely to be equally interested. Especially if we do the work for you and just hand you the dope on a platter.

SO WE'RE going to try it out. You can sit back and criticize and suggest and help. Now and then an article like Mr. Anderson's, a general survey of a whole continent. Sometimes a shorter one on some one country or river or island that's rather hazy in most people's minds. Sometimes a continent handled as to one subject only. Sometimes the striking but little known facts concerning some place comparatively well known.

Sometimes it will be a short, regular article. More often just an assemblage of interesting data. Sometimes the "dope" will be packed into the most compact form possible—just a condensed paragraph of data for ready reference. No regular rules about any of this plan—we'll just browse around for data and pass 'em along in whatever way seems to make a particular case most interesting. Our "A. A." editors will help us out. In a way, it's "A. A." material, or rather, a fine solid background for "A. A." information.

It won't take up much space and I think you'll find it rather interesting in itself and that it will make a good many stories more enjoyable to have a less hazy idea of their scenes. Fire in your suggestions and opinions as these little items appear from time to time.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Norman J. Bonney rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Arlington Heights, Massachusetts.

My life history is so uneventful that I am certain it can be of no interest. I have clerked in a bank and office for thirteen years and have never been farther from Boston than the State of Maine. I write stories hoping that they may find favor in the sight of magazine editors, and play chess now and then to keep my (alleged) brain in working order.

" 'Tis pleasant sure to see one's name in print,
A book's a book, although there's nothin' in't."

—NORMAN J. BONNEY.

IN THIS case—particularly as I can't find the letters in question—I think it will be fair to publish only the answer to them, as it indicates pretty clearly the points they raised. But I'll use A, B and C for the names of the three men, since their case is not given full statement. "E. O. Foster" is a pen-name (one of only three or four among the many who write for us) so of course you will not find it on the Army rolls, but, aside from the author's word in the matter, I've seen in newspaper type the story of his record.

E. O. Foster isn't sore. Just rising with a grin to wrestle with those who seemed to him to challenge his knowledge of his material. I don't think he's likely to go far wrong in handling the material he undertakes, but I can see why they challenged at least some of the points and this magazine wants its stories challenged—so long as it is done pleasantly.

AN AUTHOR of course has considerable liberty in shifting fact material to suit the purposes of fiction; but it happens that readers of our magazine have come to expect an exceptional degree of historical and fact accuracy. Most of our writers give it to them in exceptional degree—have established a standard, and readers naturally measure all stories by that standard. When a story seems not to toe the mark in this respect they rise to protest. Often their points are well taken and their watchfulness is most important in keeping up our standard of accuracy. There will always be slips by writers and by us here in the office, but this help from our readers enables us to keep on a level we need not be ashamed of in comparison with other magazines.

And here's an important point. Readers have no way of telling whether an author has taken liberties with facts intentionally and in full knowledge or merely through ignorance. Therefore it's all right for them to ask him to state his case.

The remedy lies right here in "Camp-Fire." I wish all our writers would do what most of them do—take pains to explain to Camp-Fire just where and how they have taken their justified liberties with facts, historical or otherwise. Then everybody will be satisfied. I've yet to hear any member of Camp-Fire object to hearing explanations of this kind, so a writer need not be in fear of boring his readers by letting them in on the inside. In fact, so far as I can judge, Camp-Fire is very particularly interested in just this kind of thing.

Here is E. O. Foster's explanation to his questioners:

Will you please extend to Messrs. A, B, and C, whether through "Camp-Fire" or as you may otherwise choose, my thanks for their interest in the "Old Spud" stories?

BELIEVING that the columns of the magazine are for fiction, not friction, I'm going to put it up to your readers as to whether or no officers of the regular establishment of the United States Army ever use profane language, and if a few, even so late as our recent war, did not have a "Bhit o' the brogue."

So far as the setting of any story I write, I must reserve the right, so long as my stuff is not labeled "historical," to throw different incidents together to make one complete whole, disregarding time and place in my endeavor to make a story that will please the great majority of your readers even if it does jar the sensibilities of a few.

To get down to our mutton.

Mr. A is right. It was the First Tennessee and not the Tenth.

The answer to Mr. C will be found in the third paragraph of this letter.

TO MAJOR B my answer is a bit different. First, "Old Spud" was an enlisted man in the Civil War and was given his commission for bravery in action, as were many officers at that time. He certainly swore; and had a rich brogue on occasion. Second, I, with the other men in my company, wore a "dog tag". The war department orders will settle this if Major B cares to inquire. Third, "Got five years to do his in" dates back long before the Spanish-American war, *when there were five-year enlistments*; fourth, there were big canoes in the Philippines; fifth, there was a power canoe in the Islands about this time, driven by an Acme gasoline engine, maybe it did not have a carbureter, but it did have some kind of a thingamajig to mix the gas; sixth, since Major B is ringing the bell on his service in the Army, I will say that I served as a private soldier over thirty years ago, was in the Spanish-American war, the Philippine campaign, on the Mexican border, in the World War, have held every grade up to major in the United States forces. and have held commissions in a foreign army from colonel to lieutenant-general.

And "that's that," to quote our good friend Noyes.

In closing I will say that I've got on my "tin kelly" and gas-mask. Let 'em all come.—E. O. FOSTER.

A WORD from Thompson Burtis concerning his complete novel in this issue:

Langley Field, Hampton, Va.

It deals with Kentucky mountaineers. The incident mentioned about the shooting down of a balloon by moonshiners is fact. That illustrates the fact that their attitude toward a stranded Army man, as in the story, is not far-fetched.

I HAVE tried to portray the best, and to hint briefly at the worst in the mountain people. As a newspaper man covering all the Army camps in the country on publicity work at the start of the war, I came into contact with mountaineers at Camp Taylor, Kentucky, Camp Lee, Virginia, and Camp Hancock in Georgia, who could neither read nor write, had never seen a railroad train, and didn't know what a postage stamp was. Some of them were good, but when they were bad they were wildcats.

An interesting sidelight on them, proving that truth is stranger than fiction, may be given by this incident, for the truth of which I can vouch. In one of the clan fights a few years ago two men were always on guard on a hillside above their enemy's house, armed with rifles. He built a stockade around the house. For two years he never went out without carrying his baby with him, thus holding the fire of his would-be assassins. The first time he ventured outside the shielding stockade alone he was shot—it took two years of constant watching to do it. There is another case, for the truth of which I can vouch, where a man who had killed another never left his house for eleven years, except for a few minutes at night. Every one, including the police, thought he had got out of the country.

I have met enough of them to know the types, although I am not an authority save in the matter of repeating the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses who know them inside and out.—BURTIS.

A CANADIAN publication says *Adventure* owes Canadians an apology because in "A. A." we grouped Canada under "North American Countries." It says "But we suppose this is all part of the campaign across the border to depreciate Canada." Says parts of the U. S. are as much snow countries as are parts of Canada.

All right, we apologize to any Canadians who feel an apology is due. It hadn't occurred to us that we were doing anything unpleasant to Canada or we'd not have done it. Been running that "North American Snow Countries" in "A. A." for years and no Canadian ever even hinted there was any slur in it and I've an idea Canadians in general haven't suffered much agony over it. But if even a few of them object to it, we're pefectly willing to change. Have already done so, in fact.

It seems to me rather amusing that any one should make, as it were, an international affair of so small a matter. "Campaign to depreciate Canada?" What campaign?

BUT there's a serious side, too, to this. So far as I can see, two countries never dwelt side by side in more friendliness than Canada and the U. S. Why try to create unfriendliness by hunting for trouble so hard that you find unfriendliness where there is none? It is little things like this that gradually build up feeling between two peoples.

On both sides of the border are found a few who seem to make more or less a business of suspecting and hating their neighbors, apparently on the benighted basis that any one outside their own nation is an enemy and a devil. It's up to the rest of us on both sides the line to calm them down. Doubtless there are as many of these trouble-makers in the U. S. as in Canada. I've heard from only a few and it only happens that these few were Canadians, showing their teeth against us because they said we'd been showing our teeth against them. Canucks and Yanks, let's try to discourage the teeth-seers among us. Tooth-talk in this case is merely silly. The only time for quite a while that we've shown our teeth we were standing at your side, not facing you, and you seemed as satisfied with the situation as we were.

I first learned from Canadian trouble-hunters that the U. S. wants to annex Canada. Very possibly they may have got that idea from some loud-mouthed Yank, but I've lived all my life in this country and have never heard a single American voice anything like a wish to annex Canada. Maybe the U. S. does want to, but Americans apparently haven't heard about it. Bosh! Or possibly boche. Let's forget this nonsense until some chip-on-the-shoulder Yank or Canuck bobs up again and needs soothing-sirup.

THE following refers to Captain Franklin's "man wanted" ad. as posted in the Adventurers' Club of Chicago and quoted at a recent Camp-Fire, asking for a man to go to India within the next thirty days to deliver a demented Hindu to the Indian Government. It's all over now, so don't apply.

I've an idea none of you would object in the least to having one of the club's flags accompany our expedition and here's hoping one of the club may be a member of the expedition.

Chicago, Ill.

I have received hundreds of letters and scores of telegrams from readers in answer to the advertisement in the magazine of September 20th. I enclose one letter (which I have answered); it has been impossible for me, however, to answer them all, so can you mention this, please, at Camp-Fire? I have answered all the telegrams. The readers of *Adventure* are evidently an adventurous lot.

I enclose a photo of one of our club flags. We have two others "out." One with Sir Ernest Shackleton on the *Quest* going to the Antarctic; the other with Carl Akeley going into Central Africa.

We wish now to make application for one of our flags to accompany the *Adventure* expedition. Our club is taking a great interest in this expedition and we hope to be allowed to send a member of our organization with it.—CAPT. F. J. FRANKLIN.

TALBOT MUNDY has lived in this country a dozen years or more and for most of that time has been an American citizen. But, until recently, he's never been west of Indianapolis. Now he's doing it. Plumb to California as a starter; after that, anywhere and everywhere. He's not the kind who map it all out in advance; he just goes somewhere and then goes somewhere else. And he likes the West—gosh, how he likes it! And Westerners. Judging from his letters, the more he likes it and them, the more he hops about the map, apparently trying to see as much of them as possible as soon as possible. Says he: "This isn't a country; it's a gosh-blamed hemisphere, full of he men."

ON ONE of his hops he sent me the following poem, which will be familiar to some of you. We have to go sort of easy on poems in "Camp-Fire." You fellows may not believe it or like it, but as a bunch you're pretty blamed poetical. Lots of poems come in from you for "Camp-Fire," some of them mighty good ones, but, if we start having poems, where will there be space for the rest of us who can't talk poetry? This poem, however, is from outside our circle, so we can take a chance. You never can tell, though; the unknown writer of it may turn out to be one of our number after all. If so, let him own up. It's a good poem.

Mr. Mundy says "it was found nailed on the door of an old prospector's cabin in the middle of the Nevada desert country. The cabin showed signs of having been occupied for about three years, but had been abandoned for a long time. The man who runs the cigar store in the Riverside Hotel at Reno got it from the prospector who found it on the cabin door, and had copies printed. Anyhow, here it is:

MORNIN' ON THE DESERT

(Found written on the door of an old cabin in Southern Nevada)

MORNIN' on the desert, and the wind is blowin' free,
And it's ours, jest for the breathin', so let's fill up, you and me.
No more stuffy cities, where you have to pay to breathe,
Where the helpless human creatures move and throng and strive and seethe.

Mornin' on the desert, and the air is like a wine,
And it seems like all creation has been made for me and mine.
No house to stop my vision, save a neighbor's miles away,
And the little 'dobe shanty that belongs to me and May.

Lonesome? Not a minute! Why I've got these mountains here,
That was put here just to please me, with their blush and frown and cheer.
They're waiting when the Summer sun gets too sizzlin' hot,
An' we jest go campin' in 'em with a pan and coffee pot.

Mornin' on the desert—I can smell the sagebrush smoke,
I hate to see it burnin', but the land must sure be broke.
Ain't it jest a pity that wherever man may live,
He tears up much that's beautiful that the good God has to give?

"Sagebrush ain't so pretty?" Well, all eyes don't see the same.
Have you ever saw the moonlight turn it to a silvery flame?
An' that greasewood thicket yonder—Well, it smells jest awful sweet
When the night wind has been shakin' it—for its smell is hard to beat.

Lonesome? Well, I guess not! I've been lonesome in a town,
But I sure do love the desert with its stretches wide and brown.
All day through the sagebrush here the wind is blowin' free,
An' it's ours jest for the breathin', so let's fill up, you and me.

Camp-Fire's Expedition

TO PRINT all the letters concerning the proposed Camp-Fire expedition is entirely impossible because of lack of space. Yet the only right way is to give to all, so far as possible, all the opinions and suggestions that have come in from you, so that as many as possible can have a hand in shaping the final decisions. Accordingly I've tried to take the most essential points from as many of the letters as we have room for—sometimes a quotation, sometimes a brief statement of the suggestion or opinion, not forgetting arguments and reasons. Some of these follow; others will be heard at later Camp-Fires.

Besides letters like the above there have been a great number that merely declared in favor of the expedition, most of these promising their support. There were no letters against it, except some that suggested some other undertaking in place of it, and these suggestions will be presented.

The expedition undoubtedly has Camp-Fire's hearty support. That means success.

Some of the main points to be decided are: Shall it be under the auspices of a museum—an expedition for scientific purposes? Where shall it be sent? How financed? What sized shares? How managed? Abbreviations will often be used to indicate votes on these questions.

San Francisco.

Museum. $1. shares; as many as he pleases to each, or certificates for 1, 5, 10, 25, 50 etc.—F. L. Stratton.

U. S. S. *Eagle* Honolulu, T. H.

Camp-Fire is going to some day be a tremendous matter—club-rooms in New York—should all pull for it. Due $1 (or maybe $5 or $10) share per member; "good will" shares to those able to buy more, plainly marked as such; preserve democratic good-fellowship feeling, all on equal footing Count me in for one share, unless some bird suggests $500 or some such figure. Even then I believe I'd try to scrape up that amount and be glad to do so.—F. C. Hill.

Duluth, Minn.

Treasure-hunting. Cocos Island.—John Anderson.

With apologies, I venture to oar in. It seems well established that rich treasure was buried on Cocos, but the many unsuccessful expeditions for it have become a byword and if we added another to the long list we'd at once be subjects of ridicule and in any case be doing only what scores or hundreds of others have already done. There's probably treasure there and probably some one will find it some day. Comrade Anderson has been planning a try at it and I hope he proves the lucky man, but doesn't the Cocos treasure seem particularly the one that this particular expedition should not go after?

Mansfield, Ohio.

Must be democratic, but that need not mean a fixed amount. Of two men with salaries of $100 and $1,000 each giving the same amount, the first is working 10 times as hard for the expedition as is the second.

FORM an *Adventure* Expedition Club, dues for, say, two years, 75c.; each pays combined mem. dues and subscription to fund, $1 or as much more as he can. Publish all names, without the amounts given, but giving totals and a list—without names—of amounts over $100. Sub. and mem. money need not be handled separately. In case of organizations or companies publish name and amount. This compromise plan has the advantage of both the plans previously suggested—fixed amount and unlimited amount.

Get a vote as often as possible. In magazine tell all interested to send in a stamped, self-addressed envelope; in these mail out ballots listing 4 or 5 plans and names for executive committee nominated by A. S. H.

Or publish the things and names to be voted on, each numbered, readers to reply on postcard giving only the numbers of what he wishes to vote for—

Plan—No. 3.

5 Committeemen—1-3-4-7-10
Region—No. 2
Time Limit—No. 3

I vote for investigating a mysterious race or tribe of which strange things are told but little known, in wild and dangerous country, preferably of big game and seat of ancient civilization, a one-time world-conquering power, miracle workers in stone, bronze, glass, a people of whom much is to be learned in interest of science and furnish interesting reports for pages of magazine. How would "The Temple of the Ten" country do? Museum idea, fine, but we, not it, should determine destination. I will contribute at least $10.—Ohioan.

Boyd, W. Va.

Will make such contribution as able and would like to take part. Suggest Gordon Young for committee.—J. Edwin Smith.

The next comrade sends a long newspaper article quoting Simon Lake, submarine inventor, on the infinite unfound treasures of the sea, now reachable by submarines—sunken treasure, pearl-beds, beds of edible shell-fish near great cities, precious coral, sponges, lost coal (can raise 300 tons an hour at net profit of $10 a ton; 864 recorded lost coal boats of U. S. Atlantic coast, probably a much greater number unrecorded; 5,000 ships other than coal-carriers recorded sunk in U. S. waters since 1879).

New Haven, Conn.

Sounds to me as though there might be plenty of excitement and satisfaction for scientists and adventurers in the above and possibly some money that could be used in building a big club-house or something along those lines.—J. W. Macquaird.

——, Wash.

If just a bunch of good fellows, untrained, go, what information *can* be got out of trip? Roosevelt in S. A. could speak only of "thousands of flowers." Same would hold as to minerals, fishes, game, etc. If *thoroughly* trained men go, nothing will escape their eyes. If a bunch of good fellows go out and get a bunch of misinformation it will be the laughing-stock of the world. Would like to see this expedition make history, but not Custer's kind. Wouldn't some institution furnish the brains if we furnish the money? —— ——

Melrose, Mass.

Young, Mundy, Smith, Lamb and Friel for committee. New Guinea for exploration and research.—L. Warren Nichols.

Havre, Mont.

A committee of ways and means; a bank holding the funds; omit a short story to get space publishing reports of expedition; shares limited to $10 each buyer—those who can't afford $10 can't afford $1; sell newspaper rights of expedition news; put money from this and from movie rights into rest of fund, making expedition semi-supporting.—Henry Stimps.

Washington, D. C.

No limit to size of contributions as we must have financial backing to meet all obstacles and to be properly outfitted would mean initial expenditure of not less than $10,000. Unexplored portions of Canadian West and Northwest; thousands square miles never trod by whites; animals and vegetable life unknown. Rumored vast herds buffalo and other supposedly extinct wild life. Exploration and historical data secured would be invaluable. Believe National Museum could be interested to help finance expedition to this region, probably most fruitful and beneficial field in all this hemisphere. Have experience in photographic end of expedition of this nature; some 10 years in all parts islands of Atlantic, Pacific and Caribbean.—James H. Roberts.

St. Louis, Mo.

Would like to see $10 of mine working to help the cause along; would not want name mentioned, only the chance to know my $10 was helping to further a good cause, except if any souvenirs were going to be given would like to get one.—Willard R. Hoyt.

Oakland, Calif.

The island John Held, Jr., speaks of (Easter I.) or South America and its outlying islands.—M. M. Fremming.

That's all we have space for this time. More letters later. As you see, there are all kinds of differences of opinion. Remember, though, that in condensing these letters I took particular pains to bring out the points on which there were differences. All the way through, on the other hand, I cut out most of the endorsements of the plan as a whole, leaving this to be inferred from the fact that they'd written in with opinions and ideas. Also remember that I have omitted entirely all the many letters that merely endorsed the expedition without taking up specific points.

Looks to me as if a systematic vote would have to be taken. If I wait till you can vote unsystematically on how the vote shall be taken, it will mean delay of two or three months. So we in the office will just go ahead. Consider carefully the suggestions already offered on voting-method, fix up the best one we can and get it into operation. Off-hand the best general plan seems the one, suggested by "Ohioan," of printing in the magazine the various questions to be decided, and numbering each question. Then any or all of you can send in a post-card or letter, giving your vote on each number.

We'll try to give you more letters at our next Camp-Fire. The bunch we already have on hand will give you a pretty good idea of the general field to be considered.—A. S. H.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921. Either separate copies or as a whole. Best offer.—Address C. V. DILS, Reading, Ohio.

WILL SELL: First Oct., 1920; First April 1921 to First July, inclusive. First Aug. 1921 to Dec. 10th issue, inclusive. Five cents each, plus carriage.—R. A. RENAL, Gen. Del., Oakland, Cal.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

LIFE AND TRADE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Pearls, Furs, Guano, Timber, Gums—Insects that Fatten Their Meat Ration on Mushrooms

by Edgar Young

IT SEEMS that a chain of trading-posts similar to those of the Hudson's Bay Company, in Canada, would be an immense benefit to both Central America and the people who ran them. American products could be introduced in this manner, and native products that are now unknown could be brought out and a market found for them.

A company large enough to run their own boats down from here, a communication inland from the coast, and the employment of the right kind of men to run the posts should make a go of it. There are numerous rivers that are navigable for good-sized vessels, or up which flat-bottomed river-boats could be run, and ideal locations along both coasts for the placing of cheap bamboo buildings until the erection of better ones was guaranteed by the volume of business.

Ivory-nuts, sugar, coffee, tobacco, mahogany, ebony, gold dust, pearls, opals, and even corn, beans and such products, could be traded in to the post for machetes, axes, small machinery, clothing, agricultural implements and general merchandise. Such a business that would help develop these rich countries should look good to some enterprising capitalist.

An individual with small capital could start a business of this kind in a small way. The building of a bamboo-thatch house is a small matter, and the expense is very light; or a building could be rented in some small place for a few dollars a month and the start be made with a very few hundred dollars' worth of goods. The Department of Commerce at Washington is acquainted with the duties into each country.

A man with what he can carry in on his back, provided he goes into the right part, can make money out of his trip. The headwaters of almost all of the rivers flowing into the Atlantic from Nicaragua and Honduras are good trading-centers for this class of trader. One trip in will give a man an idea of what he can make the most out of the next time.

Where an individual reckons on trading in heavy articles such as rubber, vanilla, etc., he can build a raft of bamboo and float his cargo out to the coast. For a man who intends peddling jewelry there is no better place than among the coffee *fincas* of Guatemala. Both the owner and his family and the laborers will buy, the former a fine grade, the latter a cheaper and flashier. At some of the larger *fincas* there are many hundred employed.

What might be classed as standard trade goods are blue overall-pants, calico, and blue work-shirts.

For one who intends trading in the cities the following method is suggested: The goods are brought in trunks or boxes and the customs paid on them in the usual manner. A room is rented in some hotel, and the goods displayed on tables or shelves. Advertisements are inserted in the local papers stating what is being offered, and the purchasers are asked to call. As a rule they are so anxious to get American products that everything is gone in short order and advance orders can be taken.

For trading of this kind only the best should be taken. Americans and Britishers who happen to reside in the city are good patrons and expect to pay high prices. Some of them are likely to want quite an order brought down the next trip.

This class of trading is fairly new to Central America although quite common in South America. One trader disposed of ninety thousand dollars' worth of silk pajamas, paper napkins, etc., in Santiago, Chile, in one week.

A certain amount is allowed free entry for personal use. It is always the best plan to pay the full duty in a lawful manner, even if approached by people who make a business of helping to smuggle goods in.

There is a great field for men with capital to buy up shipments of native products in the large cities and towns for cash and export them. American money, especially gold, is always at a premium, more so since the conclusion of the war than before.

Pearls. "In its purity, liquid beauty, and charm of romantic and poetical association the pearl—aristocrat of gems—leads even its peers of the highest rank, the diamond, the emerald, ruby, and sapphire. * * * It seems almost like desecration to reduce the lustrous pearl to the concrete mineralogical base of carbonate of lime. * * * Pearls are concretions of carbonate of lime found in the shells of certain species of mollusks. * *

"The smallest pearl in commerce is less than the head of a pin; the largest pearl known is in the Beresford Hope Collection in the museum at South Kensington, London. Its length is two inches and circumference four and a half * * * Pearls range in color from an opaque white through pink, yellow, salmon, fawn, purple, red, green, brown, blue, black, and in fact every color and several shades of each. * * * The beauty and value of the pearl, in brief, depends upon color, texture, or 'skin' transparency or 'water,' luster and form; pearls most desired are round or pear-shaped, without blemish, and having the highest degree of luster. * * *

"It is authoritatively stated that the finest single strand of large pearls in existence was recently acquired by a Western millionaire of the United States. The strand is composed of thirty-seven pearls ranging from eighteen to fifty-two and three-quarters each, the latter being the largest central pearl. The pearls combined weighed 979¾ grains, and the strand is said to have cost its possessor four hundred thousand dollars." From "A Book of Precious Stones," by Julius Wodiska: New York, 1909: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

By the foregoing it is made known that the pearl, a small bit of carbonate of lime—one of the cheapest of substances—is manufactured into a beautiful gem by certain oysters, conches and mussels. It can be correctly classed either under *fauna* as the product of a living shellfish or under minerals as being composed of carbonate of lime. It is usually to be found under the latter classification.

A great many pearls are to be encountered all along the Pacific coast of Central America from Mexico to Colombia, and a few are found on the Atlantic coast and in the fresh-water mussels of the rivers, but these latter finds are so few as to be negligible.

The finding of pearls along the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Salvador is a rather haphazard and disorganized affair covered by grants and concessions from the Governments. The Pearl Islands, a possession of the Republic of Panama, are the seat of quite a large pearl-fishing industry which is well organized.

Before the war a few buyers from England, France and Germany circulated up and down the coast buying whatever pearls they were able to find in the hands of the natives, some of which it is to be feared were "held out" on the concession-holders. As Mr. Wodiska states, all pearls of round and pear shapes without flaws are valuable. There is a saying among pearl-buyers that a pearl is "worth what you say it is," for its value is greatly enhanced when it is desired to match into necklaces and collections.

Besides the gems, large mollusks are fished for on account of their shells—mother-of-pearl being of great value—and also as a food. Some of the shells taken along the Pacific coast are of immense size.

Mahogany and Ebony. The mahogany industry is fairly well organized after a primitive fashion. Local buyers travel from end to end of the country, and much mahogany is to be found in almost any of the ports. This wood does not grow in forests as is popularly supposed, but grows at random here and there in the jungles, its great size and peculiar-colored foliage having earned for it the title of "king of the forests."

The method used in logging this wood is as follows: A spy is sent out to climb tall trees and search out any mahogany that may be in the vicinity. Trails are slashed to them, and they are marked for cutting, which is done at a certain season of the year according to a local superstition which forbids cutting them except during the waning of the full moon. This superstition is perhaps based on the fact that the sap is less abundant and the wood less likely to "check" if cut at this time and may have foundations in scientific fact. The logs are hewn square, dragged to the nearest stream with oxen, and floated to market; or if good roads are in the vicinity hauled to market in heavy antiquated ox-carts.

Many times reports have been current that all the mahogany in Central America was exhausted; but a large quantity continues to come out each year from all of the various countries, and recently the United States Government bought up great quantities to be exported to this country for the constructing of aeroplane propellers. These reports have possibly originated in the erroneous belief that mahogany is a slow-growing tree.

Mahogany has three distinct growths per year, accounting for the many growth-rings shown on the logs. It will grow to cutting size in twenty years and show twenty rings, and to immense size in forty and show one-hundred and twenty rings.

The ebony industry is also fairly well organized, but not so thoroughly as the mahogany industry. There are many varieties of true and false mahogany and ebony, many of which when dressed almost defy detection. Consequently it is well for a prospective buyer to know the existing differences. Rank amateurs have become proficient in a very short time by using high-powered microscopes and examining the make-up of small bits carefully to note the cell-construction of both true and false varieties.

Other Hardwoods. One of the Sanitary Squad, with the I. C. C. on the Zone, went into the jungles and brought out over a hundred varieties of hardwoods which he dressed, polished and oiled. Some were extremely fine of texture and beautiful of color.

This leads one to believe that many others of the native trees are just as valuable for fine cabinet work and furniture as the well-known mahogany, ebony and lignum vitæ. There exists at present a small market for the following:

Silk cotton, Santa Maria, sunwood, sapodillo, mangrove, mangrove-grape, native pine, cedar, and oak, ironwood, mahoe, locust, almond and granadilla.

Other Valuable Timbers. Recently an immense quantity of raftwood, or *balsa*, a wood half as heavy as cork, was exported to this country for the making of life-preservers for the United States Navy. Great forests of bamboo exist along some of the rivers. Locally this giant grass is utilized in several ways, such as for making unsinkable rafts of the logs—some of which are more than a foot in diameter—for splitting and nailing on as siding for houses, for making an almost indestructible piling by driving and filling with sand, for cutting the individual joints into bottles, kegs, and pails; and many other more or less useful purposes. During the scarcity of dye in this country the forests of Central America were resorted to for dyewoods with which to dye army uniforms and other cloth. The best known of the dyewoods are fustic, yellow sanders, Brazil-wood, dragon's-blood, Nicaraguan-wood and anotta.

Gum-Bearing Trees. The most popular, if the least known, gum is chicle, used for making the familiar chewing-gum of this country. Other gums taken from Central America trees that have a high commercial value are balsam, gum arabic, copaiba, copal, liquid amber, palma-Christi and rubber. Many other gum-bearing trees exist which might be exploited with great profit.

Trapping. Little trapping is carried on in Central America by the native people, possibly due to the warmth of the climate and the absence of the need of heavy furs in Winter. Among the furs which they could supply to Northern markets are the following: Otter, raccoon, puma, jaguar, ocelot, ounce, panther, fox, and conejo pintado. The skins of large snakes, iguanas, and young alligators have a high commercial value for making ladies' hand-bags, belts, etc.

Alligator skins and shark skins are bought by jewelers for mounting. A heavy exportation of deerskins occurs from Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras each year.

Preparing Furs for Market. Mr. Samuel Lewis, importer and exporter of furs and skins, Twenty-ninth Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, New York City, has been kind enough to write down directions for preparing furs for market so as to not render them valueless, as might happen should one not know how to proceed. He has to say, in part:

I will try to enlighten you as well as my knowledge of about twenty years' experience will permit me to. First as to handling furs for shipping purposes. I would advise after skinning to stretch the skin as much as you possibly can, but be sure it is done smoothly and as evenly as possible, and then fasten or nail it down, flesh side out. Never rub any alum, arsenic or salt on the pelt, as the chemicals they contain will injure it and sometimes make it absolutely worthless for marketing.

As to the drying: I would suggest that after your skins are properly stretched and nailed down, scrape off all the meat and fat with a large, dull knife so that you do not cause any cuts or damage to the skin, place it in a dry and shady place for drying. In a warm climate they should be placed in a cool place out of the way of bugs or flies (under mosquito-nets). Never dry a skin near a fire or in the sun. Always let them stay on the boards until they are dried out fairly stiff.

As to packing: Never fold or crease skins, but try to pack them as near flat as you can, and when packing try to place fur side to fur side, then paper between where pelt meets pelt.

I know of no books on furs, but can suggest the Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., which can probably give you some very good advice as to the amount of Central and South American furs that have been received here, also the last prevailing invoice price of same.

Guano. In the numerous caves of Honduras and Nicaragua, as well as in parts of Guatemala and Costa Rica, quantities of bat guano, or manure, have been deposited by swarms of bats that cling to the sides and roofs of these subterranean caverns. During the war, due to the absence of nitrates, the value of this was very high, being something like eighty dollars per ton. Even in peace times this guano has a high value as fertilizer. Some one who deals in such imports should be consulted as to prevailing prices and demand.

Flora and Fauna. With its great diversity of climate, due to elevations, difference of rainfall of the two coasts, and prevailing winds, Central America is rich in natural flora and fauna, and in opportunities thereby opened to the merchant. With a few notable exceptions the flora is almost unknown in this country; but those having access to the zoological gardens of the larger cities are fairly familiar with a majority of the larger animals, especially the larger cats, the tapir, the peccary and other mammals, as well as various reptilia and birds.

Among the insects the knowledge is more limited, being confined to books dealing with species of butterflies and a few of the other smaller insects, among which may be named the dragon-fly, a study of which by the Calverts made in Costa Rica has filled a very large volume. A party organized by the New York Zoological Park and headed by one of the curators has just returned from a long investigation into, and a collecting of, many interesting species of birds, reptiles, insects, and small mammals in the interior of Central America in some of the least known spots and will doubtless add much to the existing knowledge.

Nicaragua is especially revered by naturalists, for it was in this country many years ago that the renowned Thomas Belt made valuable discoveries in regard to ants, making known for one thing that the leaf-cutting ants grew tiny fungoids upon the remains of the decayed leaves which they stored under ground and that they neither ate the leaves nor the fungoids, but ate a tiny mite that lived on the diminutive mushrooms. Much has been said about the wisdom of the ant, and this man brought to light many interesting facts that were not known before. See "A Naturalist in Nicaragua," Thomas Belt, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1873.

Central America offers a wonderful field for one who likes to delve into the mysteries of nature at its best, and with modern instruments much valuable information could be brought to light. It appears that a man to be a real naturalist has to have a little of the *Rip Van Winkle* in him—not the sleeping proclivities but the patience he displayed when hunting and fishing. It is said *Rip* tramped for hours over lonely hills without so much as sighting a squirrel and sat for hours with a heavy pole without getting as much as a nibble. According to his own statement Washington Irving was a poor student in school, and doubtless gave the lazy *Rip* these good qualities through envy.

Fruits. The following list, while not complete, will give an idea of the immense variety of fruits to be found growing wild or under cultivation in some part or other of Central America:

Chirimoya, avocado or "alligator pear," granadillo, manzana rosa, negrito, lebibo, banana, coconut, supa, melocoton, sonsapote, zapotillo, caimito, guava, manzanillo, sandia, papaya, mango, tamarind, zapote, jacote, almendro, mamay, granado, cacao and cacao-mico, citron, pimiento, mulberry, apricot, orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit, coffee, sweet-lemon, olive, pineapple, grape, quince, wild-plum, various cantalopes and muskmelons, nance, as well as many of our own familiar temperate zone fruits, nuts and berries. Apples, pears, and peaches act peculiarly at sea-level, bearing fruit, flowers, and buds, all at the same time; however, in a high altitude they fall into something like their regular habits.

Domestic Animals. The principal domestic animals are the dog (*canis domesticus*), goat, cat, ox, ass, and a few mules and horses of small size. Many wild animals have been domesticated for household pets and are prevalent enough to be worthy of mention. The principal one is the monkey, of many varieties; peccary, and the raccoon-like *pisote*, locally called *pizarro* and *pizarro solo* for the two varieties. As pets also, the raucous parrot of many sizes and kinds, the macaw, and other forest birds, are also worthy of note.

Wild Animals and Game. The largest of the mammals is the tapir, or anta, which attains a weight of about eight hundred pounds. This animal has a long and extremely flexible proboscis which is really an extension of the nose and upper lip forming a sort of trunk about half as long in proportion to its size as the trunk of an elephant. Its heavy body and short legs are not unlike those of a well-fattened hog, but its skin is soft and covered with a heavy coat of fine hair. Its hoof is composed of three huge toes.

It roams the low, swampy ground after the manner of the rhinoceros, and is shortsighted to a marked degree similar to this same animal, but does not submerge itself under the water although it frequently wades and wallows in shallow pools. Upon being molested it either makes a fast charge toward the sound and, having missed running down the enemy, keeps on going at top speed, or it dashes away in the opposite direction.

The meat of this animal is delicious and highly prized by both natives and foreigners, resembling very closely the beef of a young steer. For this reason it is locally called *vaca del monte* or *vaca silvestre*, mountain or wild cow, by the natives. The West Indian negroes who have settled along the Atlantic coast call it by these English names.

It thrives and is very docile under domestication, the two specimens to be found in New York Zoological Park being among the most popular animals there with the keepers, who often bring bits of cake from their own tables to feed them; but no organized raising of them has ever been attempted in Central America for their flesh and tough skin.

The other larger game animals are the large cats, locally called lions and tigers, but known to us as puma and jaguar; the rarely existing black tiger, the lobo or wolf, the wild hog, which is said to be from the imported domestic breeds; the peccary, of two varieties; several varieties of deer, and the immense aquatic mammal manatee, which is supposed to be the foundation of maritime superstition regarding mermaids. The monkey, raccoon, opossum, squirrel, ant-eater, armadillo, gibeonite, sloth, coyote, hare, *pisote* and some of our own small rodents constitute the remainder of the principal animals.

Birds. Currasow or wild turkey, of several varieties; parrot, hawk, vulture, owl, sea-eagle, crow, blackbird, jay, ricebird, swallow, rainbird, humming-bird, pelican, muscovy and black duck, curlew, plover, spoonbill, teal, darter, heron, ibis, crane, partridge, quail, snipe, pigeons and doves, the quetzale or "bird of liberty" of Guatemala, and a great variety of others both large and small.

Reptilia. Alligator, crocodile, rattlesnake, corral, tamaquasa, tortoise, turtle, lizard, iguana, chameleon and various others.

Fish and Sea-Food. Oyster, lobster, crab, rockfish, kingfish, hogfish, parrotfish, grouper, snapper, porgee, shad, gar, porpoise, flounder, jewfish, sheepshead, shark, mudfish, mackerel, eel and others. Many of these may be seen in the Aquarium in New York City by those fortunate enough to be near.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelop is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

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FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, natives, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 103 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

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13. Africa Part 1
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14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached*).

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21. Balkans
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22. South America Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil (except Pará and Amazonas), Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. South America Part 3
Algot Lange, care *Adventure*. Pará and Amazonas, Brazil. Topography, customs, hunting, fishing, agriculture, lumber, industry, climate and health.

25. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

26. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

27. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions.

28. ✠ Canada Part 1
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P.. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

29. ✠ Canada Part 2
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

30. ✠ Canada Part 3
George L. Catton, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

31. Canada Part 4
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

32. Canada Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, La Connor, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

33. ✠ Canada Part 6
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

34. ✠ Canada Part 7
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

35. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

36. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

37. Western U. S. Part 2
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

38. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

39. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
John B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

40. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

41. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks. Automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

42. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Howard A. Shannon, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

43. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Hapsburg Liebe, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

44. Eastern U. S. Part 4
Dr. R. E. Hathorne, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. **ARTHUR BENT**, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address **J. L. BINDA**, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address **L. S. ROWE**, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

Ohio to Florida by Auto

"ORLANDO is the best town in Florida," says Mr. Liebe, who lives in Florida. Puzzle: What town does Mr. Liebe inhabit?

Question:—"Would be pleased with any information you can give me on the trip I am planning through Kentucky, etc., into Florida. I expect to leave here by Oct. 1st by automobile. There will be four in the party—my wife, two-year-old daughter and sister-in-law.

I retail a preparation which is sold to barbers only, and I expect to work all of the main towns on the trip down.

We are planning on camping out during our six months' trip. Our route will be working on and off the Dixie Highway from Cincinnati down and aiming to get to Florida some time in December.

Would be pleased with any suggestions you could give as to outfit and answering following questions:

1. Could water be used on this trip for drinking purposes without boiling or treating same? If must be treated what should be used?

2. Where we can not locate camp near spring or well will water-bags be practical to use in carrying water? Also, will they keep water cool? Will bags leak if sides come in contact with anything?

3. We want to take a day occasionally for fishing and hunting. Will we have to take out a license in any of the States that we pass through? Also, would there be any chance of the authorities bothering us because of carrying firearms?

4. Would there be any danger of the family being molested in permanent camp while I work near-by towns?

5. Do you think the roads would be much of a hindrance to us getting there at this time of year, and would the roads off the main highway be possible?

6. After arriving in Florida in case I want a change of occupation could I get employment such as picking fruit? And what are the wages?

7. I am going to buy a compass. What make would you suggest, and what are the rules governing use of same?

8. What kind of a tent and equipment would you advise? I rather like the principle of the Gipsy Tent. Is it practical? It is made by the Dial Ogden Co., of Columbus, Ohio.

9. Are we liable to come in contact with venomous snakes, insects, etc., while camping in the Southern States? For the bite of same what is the first-aid treatment to have at hand for same? In addition to this what should be included in a medicine-chest on such a trip?

10. Is dehydrated food practical, and where can it be gotten?

11. What make of field-glass do you suggest, and the price of same?

If this letter should be published in *Adventure* please omit name. Use initials only. Enclosed find stamped envelope."—H. M. D., Canton, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—Kentucky is not in my territory of the "Ask Adventure" service. I can give you up-to-date information on the route if you come *via* Chattanooga and Atlanta; if you don't, inquire at one town or city as to the best route to the next, at garages.

Go from Chattanooga to Atlanta *via* Rome, not *via* Dalton; it's longer but a far better road. Regular route from Atlanta to Macon. You can cut Macon out and save miles by going across from Barnesville *via* Ft. Valley to Perry, if you like. Go from Perry down to Ashburn (all these towns in Georgia) and there make specific inquiry as to route *via* Tifton and Valdosta to Madison, Florida; unless the report is very good, better turn to right and go to Madison *via* Sylvester, Moultrie, and Quitman. This was the best road I ever saw last time I was over it, but is longer than to go *via* Valdosta. Valdosta, by the way, is about the prettiest little city in Georgia.

Go from Madison, Florida, to Live Oak, to Lake City, and to High Springs; these towns all in Florida. At High Springs inquire as to best route to Gainesville, whether *via* Alachua or Newberry. Gainesville is Florida's main seat of education. From Gainesville go by regular route to Ocala, Leesburg, Eustis, and Orlando; Orlando is the best town in Florida and a sort of "hub." From here you can go anywhere you like.

This route cuts out Jacksonville. Roads through Georgia to Jacksonville are apt to be very bad, especially from Waycross down; I paid $5 per mile to be dragged through mud half-way of the radiator on some of that road last Summer. It took three negroes and four mules, and my six-cylinder car running like the —— in low with chains on all wheels—and it ruined a $75 paint job I'd just had done on the old boat. Now to your specific questions:

1. I always got water in towns we passed through, carried it in gallon bottles, and never boiled it. It should be boiled if taken from country wells or springs after you get half-way of Georgia. I never treated water in any way except by boiling.

2. Can't tell you anything about water-bags. Jugs or bottles are O. K.

3. You will have to take out non-resident license for hunting (which comes high everywhere) or else take a chance. No license necessary for fishing unless for the market. I always carried a revolver in the car, and was never bothered about it. In States that have the new Wild-Life Law it is unlawful to carry a shotgun or rifle except in the hunting season; Florida has it.

4. Not a great deal of danger of the family being molested in camp, I should say, while you work nearby towns. Camp close to town, and teach the wife how to shoot. Practically no danger at all perhaps.

5. The roads are usually better in September and October than at any other time of year. Most roads off main highways are passable unless very wet.

6. Employment after you get here? Ordinarily I should say yes. But as I write this it is probable that work will be a little scarce. However, "there's a way wherever there's a will." Wages are about like they are anywhere else.

7. Don't know a thing about compasses. I always used Indian logic in the woods—and a big thing is to keep direction in your head, and remember what you see. I've beat men with compasses this way. It's nearly always sunshine down here, you know, and if you know what time of day it is, what do you need of a compass? The sun's in the east in the morning and in the west in the afternoon, and you can locate certain stars after sunset, etc.

8. Any kind of light, water-proof tent is all right. Cut out poles and ridge-pole by stringing it on a rope between trees or between your car and a tree. This will give you a headlight for light, if the car faces the tent. I used to carry a tent that covered the whole car and left a space on either side for a folding Army-type bed; our two children slept in the car seats. The only objection was that the blamed thing was too heavy to handle and to carry.

9. You are not apt to be troubled with anything in the shape of insects except mosquitoes, and not much with these in the Winter. These can be kept out by cutting a "window" in either end of the tent and closing it with mosquito-netting.

In case of snake bite, do this: Bind the limb tight above the wound; cut a cross-mark, as deep as the snake's teeth went, in each little wound; if no abrasions on the lips, suck the wound; then fill the cuts with moistened crystals of permanganate of potassium, and shoot into the surrounding tissue a solution of this same permanganate with a hypodermic, and release the cording a little to keep the flesh from "dying." These of course are emergency measures.

A doctor should be had as quickly as possible, after the binding of the limb. But you are not at all apt to be bitten. There are not many poisonous snakes down here except in the very wildest places. See your doctor as to the permanganate solution.

10. As to medicines, I would take along anything I was apt to need. Iodin, aromatic spirits of ammonia, aspirin, something of the nature of sodium phosphate or sal hepatica, etc., with an emergency roll of bandage cloth. You're not apt to need the latter-named, but "you never can tell."

As to dehydrated foods, I've never used them. But I imagine they'd be all right. You can buy anything you want in the towns you pass through.

11. I've never used field-glasses. Doubtless there are any number of good makes. We don't have much opportunity to use them here. It's a wholly flat country.

If this is published, your name will be omitted. The magazine does not publish names against the inquirer's wishes.

I believe this answers your letter. Wish you good luck and an enjoyable trip down.

The South American Amazons

THE origin and history of this myth are interesting:

Question:—"Can you give me any information on the tribe of women warriors that inhabited the northern part of South America known as the Amazons? My grandfather crossed and recrossed the isthmus many times and told tales of the Amazons along with other stories of S. A. What I wish to know is, was there ever a tribe of that kind, and if so are they still in existence?

Please give me the habits of the people inhabiting the central part and western part of Brazil, their friendliness to the whites and the prospects of finding gold or some valuable metal to pay the cost of trip. Would one want to travel solely by boat, or by boat and burro?"—W. I. ROBERTSON, Limerick, N. Y.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—It is rather curious that this story about the women warriors being in any way connected with the Amazon region of South America should crop up again. The Amazons, according to Greek legend, were a race of women that dwelt in the neighborhood of the Black Sea and the Caucasian Mountains. They were supposed to compose a state from which men were excluded and to have devoted themselves to war and to hunting; and, according to legend, they were often in conflict with the Greeks of the heroic age. The Amazons and their contests and customs were a favorite theme in Grecian art and story.

These supposed Amazons were probably nothing more than priestesses, but they got on the imagination of the Greeks and their followers in culture, and consequently of the Spaniards and Portuguese. When the Spaniards discovered South America and reached the waters of the Amazon, they heard the legend of female warriors, and they applied to them the name "Amazons," and to the region "Río de las Amazonas," or "River of the Amazons." The story of the tribe of warlike women spread over South America and then throughout the world, but there seems to have been no ground whatsoever for it. There certainly was no such tribe, and we have no reliable information regarding any considerable number of unusual women. No such tribe therefore exists at the present time.

The central and western part of Brazil is inhabited by the descendants of Europeans or Europeans, by native Indians, of many tribes and with many languages, by negroes or by people of mixed blood. In general they are friendly enough to outside people of European or of North American stock, which is what I suppose you mean by "whites."

Much gold and silver are to be found in Brazil, gold particularly in the State of Minas Geraes. As to whether it would pay or not, no one can say. If one were energetic, fortunate and had funds on which to maintain himself for a sufficient length of time, he would doubtless succeed. Many parts of Brazil can be reached by railroad and steamer. As to other parts, all would depend upon where one desired to go.

Hydah Canoes Again

MR. CATTON supplements an earlier "Ask Adventure" question and answer with the following very interesting information. It indicates that the age of specialization of products had already dawned among the Indians of the North Pacific Coast, when the white man showed up:

Tweed, Ont., Can.

Re Mr. Schwalm's question to Mr. Carson *re* Hydah, or Haida, canoes in issue of November 10, 1921:

Haidas were premier canoe-builders of the Pacific, if not of the world. Made canoes for other Pacific coast tribes, Niskas, Giatkatlas, Tsimsheans, etc. Bela-bela Indians also canoe builders, but not in same class.

Haida canoes ranged from seventy-two feet in length—war canoes—down to twenty feet and even less. Were dugouts, made from single red-cedar trunk. Accommodated with ease from twenty to thirty men—the largest. Were artistically molded and very finely finished outside and in, and were often decorated at stem and stern and frequently all over with designs done in teeth and mother-of-pearl.

They were widest at the middle and tapered to a point at either end, and the prow was higher than the stern. Only trouble was their tendency to split lengthwise, the way of the grain, which was overcome with ribs.

They were supplied with thwarts of three-inch cedar lashed in with twisted cedar bark. Stood up and weathered the worst storms on the long miles between islands, and between islands and mainland, and coastwise. Were used with sail and driven with paddles, and poled up-stream against currents. Were steered with sweep at stern, or with paddles, according to size. War canoes, manned by twenty or more men or with sail or both, outran the earlier power-boats in the same water.

For further information read "In the Wake of the War Canoe", by W. H. Collison, published by Seeley, Service & Co., Limited, 38, Great Russell Street, London.—GEORGE L. CATTON.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Free-Lance Trading in the South Seas

SPLENDID way to lose money:

Question:—"The writer spent some nine years in the Pacific, having lived in the Hawaiian and Fiji groups, but has been out of touch with this part of the world for about ten years.

I am writing you for information on the possibility of trading in the different groups. My idea is to sail from New York or the Maritime Provinces in a 500-ton registered schooner with auxiliary power, carrying freight and passengers. The passengers will pay a certain sum for the trip, taking with them trade goods or any standard line of manufactured articles that you would advise. Our intention is to visit Australia, making a through trip, stopping at any islands where we can trade.

What I would ask you is: What flag would be the best to sail under? What islands should we visit, and what trade goods should we take and what would we take in trade from the islanders?

I might say that we have all the time in the world. How long a trip would it be approximately, visiting the islands you suggest and spending whatever time necessary to trade? What are the trade regulations of the islands you suggest?

We will sail through the Panana Canal, visiting Jamaica on the way and taking on a load of hooch for local and foreign consumption. I might say that that we are not booze-fighters, but if you have lived in the islands you will realize the necessity of having something on your hip.

From Panama what route would you advise? Should we sail directly to Tahiti, or visit any other islands lying off the coast of South America?

It is possible at the present time to purchase from manufacturers here surplus stores of almost any goods desired. Do you think that American goods will sell in these islands? If I have left out any questions I shall have to depend on your good nature to inform me.

Would it pay us when we get to the islands to carry freight from one to the other, or to New Zealand or Australia or America?

I would be pleased to reimburse you for any expense you may be put to in answering this letter."—B. T. NASE, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Charles Brown:—After the utmost consideration I am minded to write you as follows:

Your idea of sailing a 500-ton registered schooner into the South Seas is a good one, but the chances are ten to one that the venture (or is it an adventure?) will go down in the log as a financial catastrophe. The reasons are obvious.

Because of the prohibitive exchange rates, South Sea islanders have practically stopped buying American goods. Months ago they learned that it is cheaper to send all the way to France, England, Australia and New Zealand for the commodities they need. America will have to do considerable price-cutting before she can compete in the South Seas with these countries.

Another thing is against you. It is the uncontestable system built up by the great South Sea trading-companies, concerns with millions of dollars behind them. They would make things so hot for you and your passengers that all of you would be lucky if you escaped with your hides. And behind these companies are the trading-laws and tariff duties of the various groups. Too, no trader or planter would think for one moment of letting you have a cargo. For he knows too well on which side his bread is buttered.

I do not know where and under what conditions you would dispose of your "hooch." In most of the groups it is a criminal offense to give or sell liquor to natives. I tell you that the South Seas have changed in the last ten years. Even in beautiful Tahiti, the Paris of the South Pacific, things are not as they once were.

As I have never had occasion to register a vessel of any description, save sundry "schooners" of California steam beer, I can not advise you as to what flag you should sail under. Nor can I say how long your trip will take. Ever there are unforeseen mishaps and delays to contend with.

If things were favorable for such a trip, I should sail from Panama over to the Marquesas Islands, then through the Paumotus and on up to Tahiti and the other Society Islands.

I have been very candid, perhaps a bit brutal, but I just don't want to hear of you and your passengers losing good American dollars at this time. They'll be needed this Winter.

Two-Purpose Shotgun

ONE barrel is full cylinder, the other full choke:

Question:—"What make and type of shotgun would you recommend for me to purchase? Our hunting will all be done in a hilly and heavily wooded country, necessarily at short range.

Can I get a gun which will be all right for both rabbits and birds? Would you advise a double-barrel or pump gun? What are the advantages and disadvantages of both?

I imagine that in this sort of a country a straight-cylinder barrel would be better than a full or medium choke. Am I right? Would you advise a twelve gage or something smaller?

Any other hints you might be able to give me in the handling or selection of a gun will be greatly appreciated. What do you know about the three-barreled combination shotgun and rifle? Is such a weapon practical?"—R. L. Bowman, Fairmount, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—The only gun I know of that would suit your specifications in every way is made specially by the Ithaca Gun Co., Ithaca, N. Y., though possibly any other firm can make it for you. It is their 12 gage with sunken rib. It has the right barrel full cylinder and the left full choke, and is very light for that gage. For your purpose on account of the difference in barrels it will suit you in every way. It is a splendidly constructed gun, and you have the open barrel for close shooting and another for long distance.

I have never liked the three-barrel combination rifle and shotgun. The balance was altogether wrong, and it was not right for birds. They are no longer made in this country, but are made by Sauer in Germany and marketed under the name of Fred Adolph, Geneva, N. Y. As you shot a rifle well you will easily get on to a shotgun.

The Climate of Bermuda

WONDERFUL! But you can't live on climate:

Question:—"I take the liberty of writing you on account of invitation extended by *Adventure*, to ask for some information in regard to Bermuda and other West India islands.

What is the climate (year round) of Bermuda islands (*a*) as to health, (*b*) as to pleasantness?

Are there any business opportunities there, or in other West India islands for a man of small capital, say from $1,500 to $2,500?

What of social conditions in Bermuda, and other British islands?

Are the same heavy taxes levied there as in the mother country?

What of the fishing and wild-fowl shooting?

Can board be secured at a reasonable figure in the islands?"—(The Rev.) C. W. Boyd, Sumter, S. C.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—Bermuda enjoys what I believe is one of the most perfect climates in the world, speaking out of an experience which covers a quarter of a century of travel and extends to very nearly every known land. Perhaps you might consider it hot at some times during Summer; but it never reaches the Summer heat of New York or Charleston. It is healthy for any except asthmatic subjects, I believe.

I have lived here some three years, with two growing young daughters, and none of us has suffered ill health to such an extent as we did while living around New York, Staten Island, Long Island or Maryland.

As for business opportunities, I can not paint so pleasing a picture. The place isn't big enough. Social conditions here are good—about on the English standard—and taxes are light. Fishing is good—that is, deep-sea fishing—but there is no shooting at all except at clay pigeons or occasional tame rabbits.

Board usually is HIGH (capitals intentional). Bermuda is a Winter resort, and residents pay accordingly. Boarding-house and hotel keepers, and merchants generally, make a fair living; the rest shuffle along pretty promiscuously unless they either have means of livlihood independent of place—as writers, artists, or independent persons—or enjoy a clerical living here. It seems to be a Paradise for brethren of the cloth.

I understand from your parish that you are American. Why not try Porto Rico, the Virgin Islands, or even land nearer home? If the islands are preferred, the Virgin Islands are not to be despised by any means. Let me know your views.

Homesteading in Western Canada

THE land's there, but it's miles from the railroad:

Question:—"I would like some information about homesteading in Canada. How much land can one man take up? When is the best time in the year to come up there? Two of us are coming up there next year, and any information you give us will be appreciated. How much cash would it take to get started? I think we have enough to get started by cutting the corners close."—W. H. Nay, Clarksburg, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—There is good land available in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan for homesteading. The land in Saskatchewan is heavier than that in Manitoba, but all is eminently suited for grain-growing. By writing to the Lands Offices at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; and Dauphin, Manitoba, you can get particulars regarding land open for homesteading in those two districts, which are among those most promising at present open.

At the present time all the land within fifteen miles of the railroads is reserved by the Canadian Government for returned soldiers from this country, but there are good tracts of land outside this belt, which should be connected by rail before long.

One man can take up a quarter-section of land, the entry fee for which is $10. The applicant must declare his intention of becoming a British subject as soon as he is qualified. At the end of three years a patent can be secured as long as the regulations have been complied with, which include the residence for six months of each year on the homestead.

As far as the amount of money you would need is concerned, it would be rather hard for me to make an estimate, but many people manage to scrape along on practically nothing. However, a little capital is a great advantage.

The best time to come up to this country would be May or June, as prior to that everything is frozen up for six months.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ANSELL, EDWARD CLARENCE TRELAWNEY. (Rex.) Age forty-two years, five fect five or five and a half inches, hazel eyes, fair hair, gray over his ears, slight build. Supposed to have come to New York from England, October 1920. May be suffering from temporary loss of memory. Any information will be appreciated by his wife who has good news for him.—Address MRS. QUEENIE ANSELL, care of *Adventure*.

SWANN, CHARLIE. Of Nashville, Tenn., who was aboard the S. S. *Barbadian* when she went aground in March, 1905, off Florida.—Address GIL V. A. CLARKE, Hotel Chase, Portland, Me.

GLEASON, JOHN J. Last heard from was working as a counterman in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in a restaurant. Left there a year ago. Wears glasses, and has several gold teeth in front of mouth. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address wife, MRS. EMMY GLEASON, 408 2nd Ave., New York, N. Y.

HEBERT, N. A. (DELL). Last heard from was in Chicago. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address J. R. PHILLIPS, 2924 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill.

WILLIAMS, HARRY H. Married Bessie May Daugherty about twenty-five years ago, and was divorced October, 1920, in St. Paul, Minn. Last heard of in Nashville, Tenn. If he cares to hear from his son who is now married and has two children please write.—HARRY E. WILLIAMS, Box 134, Talmage, California.

JONES, OSCAR (SLIM). Sgt. late of R. U. 311, Camp Holabird, Maryland. Last heard of in Ruleville, Miss., and Atlanta, Ga. Any information will be appreciated.—Address A. V. SCHULZ, 406 East 153rd St., New York, N. Y.

McCABE, JOE R. Age about forty-nine. May be in Mo. Any information concerning his whereabouts please write to his daughter.—Address MRS. CHAS. MITCHELL, Gen. Del., Albuquerque, N. Mexico.

JACQUES, FRANK L. Formerly a coxswain of the U. S. S. *Seattle*. Am still in the same place in Texas. Please write.—G. H.

HARRIMAN, ROBERT CLAYTON. Left Toronto 1919. Last heard of at Bracebridge, Canada. Lived for a while in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Marion, Ind. Any information will be appreciated.—Address mother, MRS. LAURA HARRIMAN, 42 Oak St., Toronto, Canada.

BILL. (Last name not known.) Served in Navy overseas 1917 and 1920. Home was in California. Was working on tug, *Pennsylvania* at Philadelphia in 1919 or 1920. Please write to your old friend Jim.—JAMES WESLEY MCABEE, B. Division, U. S. S. *Delaware*, care of Postmaster, N. Y. City.

F. W. D. Co. 20. Located at Cotton and Grant Boul., El Paso, Texas, October, 1916. Drivers or mechanics please write to EDWARD J. GUTTERIDGE, 5 Ash St., Carnegie, Pa.

CO. I, 3rd BATT. ENGINEERS. Stationed at Fort De Russy, Honolulu and Fort Shafter 1912 to 1914. Any privates or non-com's who were enlisted men in this outfit at that time please write me.—Address EDWARD J. GUTTERIDGE, 5 Ash St., Carnegie, Pa.

BROWNING, ROBERT F. Age twenty-eight, height five feet ten inches, left arm missing, black hair, hazel eyes. Served in France with Co. S. 318th Infantry 80 Division as Second Lieut. Left home June 13, 1921. In Norfolk, Va., June 17, 1921. No trace of him since. Any information will be appreciated by his wife.—MRS ELIZABETH B. BROWNING, West Hurley, N. Y.

MOLEWITZ, WILLIAM. Last heard of at Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Ill. Believed to be on one of the mine-sweepers on Atlantic Coast. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. P. ROSINSKI, U. S. S. *Maddox* (168) Charleston, S. C.

DAYVE, EDWARD C. Last heard of in New York. Was in A. E. F. Your old buddy would like to get in touch with you.—Address PAUL H. HESSELBACKER, 1829 W. Fairmount Ave., Baltimore, Md.

RIFFLE, C. H. Last heard of in Tonopah, Nevada. Would like to hear from him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. GEO. GIBSON, 514 O St., Fresno, California.

LAIRD, LAWRENCE RUSSELL. Son. Please write to mother often. Just so I know you are well and happy. Am willing to wait and some day I know you will come home. I love and trust you and there is nothing to forgive.—Mrs. Lulu Laird, 456 9th Street, San Bernardino, Cal.

PARENTS of GEORGE CALDWELL, who was born in Springfield, Mass., 1889, and adopted by H. K. Brown of Hudson, New Hampshire when seven years of age. Father then employed as a street-car conductor in Springfield. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Geo. Caldwell, 201 West 4th Street, Oklahoma City, Okla.

CAL DOYENING or JOE or any of the old gang who served under Casomi in Central America and Lower Mexico, and boys who were with me in Cape Town, South Africa, please write.—Bud Black, care of *Adventure.*

REYNOLDS, MISS KATTIE AGNES. Formerly of Peoria and Chicago, Ill. Now eighteen years of age. Brown eyes and hair, and has a pit above bridge of nose. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Mrs. W. S. Reynolds, 226 Louise St., Peoria, Ill.

THE following have been inquired for in either the February 10th or February 20th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine.

AGNEW, Thos.; Barrow, Edward C.; Beck, Louis M.; Brown, Eddie Alford; Brown, Miss Josephine; Clarke, Gilbert Van Antwerpt; Kepner, Mrs. Edith; King, Phillips; Le Effe, Jack; Leider, Dolores; Mannion, Michael Patrick; McNally, Patrick and Joe; Richter, George Alfred; Sharman, George; Specter or Speck, Mary and Louise; Washburn, Hugh E.

MISCELLANEOUS—Ex-Soldiers who served under Sgt. Edwin Swain, 354 Bakery Co., St. Aignan, A. E. E. France; Lonergan, Sgt. Patrrick; Meehan, Jack or any boys of Co. C. 29th Inf.; Shipmates on U. S. S. *Balch* in 1918 who knew Elza Newman; Tynn, G. M.; Blais, Douglas; Patten, S. S.; Osborne, C. E.; Card, Sam; O'Reilly, E. M.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us their present address and proof of identity:

ALDRIDGE, F. P.; Abrams, Wesley; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Butterfield, E. E.; Barrett, Ramond; Buckley, Ray; Bollinger, C. J.; Bennett, Mr. and Mrs.; Bushby, Ed. F.; Bailey, Dick; Courtlandt, Victor; Cook, Wm. N.; Cook, Elliott D.; Connor, A. M.; Craun, G. E.; Clark, Wilfred J.; Corbett, Fred P.; Coles, Bobby; Carr, John; Carpenter, Robert S.; Coston, O. A.; Corporal; Chatvaire, J.; De Brissac, Sr. Ricardo; Evans, B. R.; Fisher, 1st Sgt. R.; Gale, Geo. A.; Gallagher, Owen; Grimm, H. C.; Harris, Walter H.; Haskins, S. S.; Howard, Charlie; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Hughes, Frank E.; Hooker, Wm. Francis; Hailstorm, Chief; Jackson, Robert R.; Kelly, C. H.; Kuckaby, Wm. Francis; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Klug, Chas. C.; Larisey, Jack; Lovett, Harold S.; Lafler, Harry; Lee, Wm. R., M. D.; Lonely Jock; Lauder, Harry; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacKintosh, D. T. A.; Mendelson, Aleck; Minor, Dr. John; McKee, A. L.; McNair, Harry S.; McNickle, W. A.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nylander, Towne J.; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, Dr. M.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Pigeon, A. H.; Pulis, H. F.; Posner, Geo. A.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Wag. Bob; Rogan, Chas. B.; Ryder, H. S.; Rundle, Merrill G.; Roberts, Walter; Rutherford, Max; St. Claire, Fred; Schmidt, G.; Scott, James F.; Smith, G. O.; Starr, Ted; Stocking, C. B.; Sloan, Charles; Stewart, Ernest J.; Spencer, Robert; Terry, Lambert; Von Gelucke, Byron; Van Tyler, Chester; Wiley, Floyd; Ward, Frank B.; Williams, Roger; Yames, Reuben L.; Third Officer S. S. *Lake Elmdale*; WS-XV; No. 439; S. 177284; W. W. T; J. C. H.; 2480; T. W. S.; C. C. C.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at the address given do not reach you.—Address L. B. Barretto, care of *Adventure.*

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MARCH 10TH ISSUE

Besides the complete novelette and the new serial mentioned on the second contents page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE WHITE DAWN A Four-Part Story. Conclusion — ***Hugh Pendexter***
Facing the Indians along the Mohawk.

RED NIGHT — ***Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur***
Pierre Faidit takes a new master.

THE MAN WHO COULDN'T MISS — ***H. H. Birney, Jr.***
The Apache-killer meets the Mexican bandits.

A DEBT AT SEA — ***Bill Adams***
A fight between crimps and sailors.

THE YACHT *ADVENTURE* — ***Frank H. Shaw***
With a fancy skipper on rough seas.

JEFF, THE "GUESSER" An Off-the-Trail Story — ***Theodore Seixas Solom[illegible]s***
The laziest bum on the Yukon.

THE MAN-HUNTERS — ***G. [illegible]***
Shootin'—high and wide.

THE BREATH OF HELL — ***Violet [illegible]***
A bank robbery in New Zealand.

THE HICK
Sleuthing in the Florida bayous.

World-Sweep of Wireless Brings You Big Opportunities!

Wireless Expansion is Sweeping Over the World Like Wild-Fire! Big Opportunities Are Open Now On Land and On Sea. You Can Share Them and the Amazing Future Offered by this Fascinating Big-Pay Field. Our Patented New Automatic Inventions Make Wireless **Amazingly Easy for Anyone to Learn**—At Home.

World's Fastest Growing Field Opens Big Opportunities to You

Here are just a few items to show you how Wireless is sweeping over the world like wild-fire. On land and on sea wonderful opportunities are eagerly looking for YOU. And even now Wireless has only taken a few short steps compared to the amazing expansion that is now on the way. Surely this World-Sweep of Wireless holds a real message for those who want to cash in big on a fascinating, uncrowded field filled with amazing opportunities.

A $20,000,000 American corporation has been formed to establish wireless stations in every part of the globe.

The U. S. Merchant Marine operates over 30,000 vessels. Wireless is now a necessity on ships.

The Chicago Tribune now receives foreign news by wireless. Other papers are calling upon wireless too.

Huge wireless stations are springing up all over the world. Saint Assise, France; Bordeaux, Ville Juif, and Lyons, France; Peking, China; Geneva, Switzerland; Shanghai, China; Fiji Islands; Warsaw, Poland—and these are but a few.

Many railroads are calling upon wireless to dispatch trains and carry on communication. The Lackawanna, The Louisville & Nashville, The Canadian-Pacific, The Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis are some of them. New York, Cleveland, Chicago, and Detroit are connected by an inter-city wireless service.

Criminals are being intercepted by wireless through the Police Department of New York, Dallas, Chicago and other cities.

Brokers, Bankers, Merchants, Manufacturers and other business concerns are calling upon wireless. John Wanamaker, Goodyear Rubber Co., Standard Oil Co., New York Stock Exchange are only a few.

Farmers are getting Market and Weather reports daily by wireless in all sections of the country.

New wireless stations are springing up in every part of America. Belfast, Maine; Cape May, N. J.; East Pittsburg, Pa.; San Francisco, Cal.; Helena, Montana; Seattle, Washington; Mobile, Alabama—these are but a few.

The Aerial Mail Service of the Post Office Department already has 12 radio stations in operation.

The Japanese are constructing a powerful station in the Orient.

A big new wireless service is being established between England and France.

The Federal Telegraph Co. is establishing a complete train of stations on the Pacific Coast.

Messages are sent from the Philippine Islands to Washington (10,000 miles) in 3 minutes.

Daily wireless service between the United States and Japan is in full operation—St. Johns, Newfoundland, is operating a [illegible]ge service.

Dan[illegible] in Europe, is carrying on large wireles[illegible]erations.

Thre[illegible]endous stations are operating on Lon[illegible]and at Easthampton, Port J[illegible]East Moriches.

[illegible] is planning to establish a [illegible]t Rio de Janeiro, Asun-[illegible] and Montevideo.

[illegible]erican concern offers [illegible]ation between the [illegible] France, England, [illegible] Denmark, Sweden, [illegible]land [illegible]lulu and Japan.

And t[illegible]w of the examples showing [illegible]pansion is spreading ove[illegible]It brings you amazing [illegible]nd you can now easily grasp them.

Now Easy to Learn

At Home in Spare Time

You yourself have probably read and heard about the enormous world-wide strides Wireless has made in a few short years. But do you know that now YOU can easily share the amazing opportunities that have opened up? Do you know that through Four Wonderful New Inventions YOU can now quickly and easily learn Wireless **at home in your spare time?** A fascinating big-pay field that you can put your heart into is eagerly calling for you. And now—no matter whether you know a thing about Wireless or about Electricity at the present time — you can speedily step into the wonderful future Wireless offers you!

Would you visit every nook and corner of the earth? Learn Wireless!

Which for You—Land or Sea?

Do you long to visit every nook and corner of the world? Or would you rather locate in a land station near your home or in another section of the country? Wireless offers you your choice. From the sea and from the land comes the call. From the sea comes the call of the U. S. Merchant Marine (operating hundreds of vessels on the seven seas) and of private steamship lines—reaching India, Africa, China and ports in every part of the world. Big opportunities are offered, with the chance to see the whole face of the earth, as an officer with luxurious quarters and good pay.

From the land, too, comes the call of the new forces that have formed to make Wireless the greatest means of communication in existence. Just a few of the items showing this amazing sweep of expansion are shown here. Wireless Corporations, Business Houses, Governments, Railroads, Police Depts., Newspaper Publishers, Banks, Chambers of Commerce, Agricultural Stations, Cities—in every field the expansion of Wireless is sweeping forward. And, now as never before, is YOUR life-time opportunity to cash in big on the splendid advantages this fascinating field offers you!

Big Money in Wireless

Through Four Remarkable Inventions, the basis of our famous Four-Step Method for Home Study, the National Radio Institute makes it easy for **any one** to learn Wireless at home; no matter whether you know a thing about it or about electricity at the present time. And wireless is one of the highest paid professions. As operator you start at a salary of $150 a month. Better still, with all expenses paid saving is easy. It is not uncommon for operators to save as much as $1,000 a year and from operator you can advance right up to the big jobs (Radio Engineer, Radio Executive, etc.), paying up to $25,000 a year!

The National Radio Institute was the original and is today the oldest and largest wireless school in America teaching wireless by mail. This Institute is officially recognized by the U. S. Department of Commerce, its diploma is given official credit, its name heads the list of schools recommended by the Shipping Board. Thousands of students have been graduated and have entered this uncrowded field. And through these Four Wonderful New Inventions, the National Radio Institute will qualify you for a fine Wireless position in a short period during your spare time.

Special Opportunity Now Open

The urgent need for operators and the calls which come to us for our students prompt us to make a special offer open to new students for a limited time. Through this special offer you will receive without extra cost our new course in Wireless Telephony.

Let us tell you how you can travel all over the world with easy work and good pay. Or, if you wish, you can accept one of the big wireless positions on land which are now urgently in need of your services.

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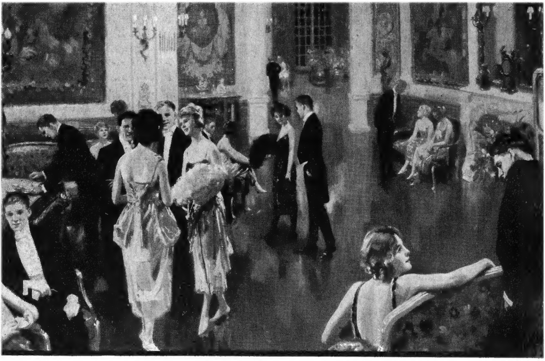

Clothes that Belong in the Smartest Gathering

—and at a saving of 50c to $10 on every gown

IMAGINE! The kind of clothes you have always longed for, and for less money than any clothes you ever made before! Imagine having the fulfillment of your dearest desires become an economy instead of a luxury! A wonderful invention —the Deltor—makes it all possible! For now every woman, no matter what the skill of her needle or the limitations of her purse, can revel in clothes that bespeak Paris.

Enclosed in the envelope with your Butterick Pattern is this wonderful Deltor. It is not a part of the pattern itself, but a separate patented service—a picture-guide especially planned for the pattern it accompanies. It is a practical, easy-to-follow and marvelously economical interpreter of the smartness that is *Paris!*

Select your Winter wardrobe from among the new Parisian fashions which appear at Butterick counters simultaneously with their acceptance in the Butterick Shop in Paris on the Avenue de l'Opêra.

From the simplest blouse for a boy to the most intricate frock for yourself—your sewing can attain a new professional appearance. And no matter how small the garment, the Deltor saves money *al*

THE DELTOR

Now with Butterick Patterns